FORSYTE SAGA

Complete

By John Galsworthy

\_[ED. NOTE: The spelling conforms to the original: "s's" instead of our

"z's"; and "c's" where we would have "s's"; and "...our" in colour

and flavour; many interesting double consonants; etc.]\_

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THE MAN OF PROPERTY

TO MY WIFE:

I DEDICATE THE FORSYTE SAGA IN ITS ENTIRETY,

BELIEVING IT TO BE OF ALL MY WORKS THE LEAST

UNWORTHY OF ONE WITHOUT WHOSE ENCOURAGEMENT,

SYMPATHY AND CRITICISM I COULD NEVER HAVE

BECOME EVEN SUCH A WRITER AS I AM.

PREFACE:

\_"The Forsyte Saga" was the title originally destined for that part of it

which is called "The Man of Property"; and to adopt it for the collected

chronicles of the Forsyte family has indulged the Forsytean tenacity

that is in all of us. The word Saga might be objected to on the ground

that it connotes the heroic and that there is little heroism in these

pages. But it is used with a suitable irony; and, after all, this long

tale, though it may deal with folk in frock coats, furbelows, and a

gilt-edged period, is not devoid of the essential heat of conflict.

Discounting for the gigantic stature and blood-thirstiness of old days,

as they have come down to us in fairy-tale and legend, the folk of the

old Sagas were Forsytes, assuredly, in their possessive instincts, and

as little proof against the inroads of beauty and passion as Swithin,

Soames, or even Young Jolyon. And if heroic figures, in days that never

were, seem to startle out from their surroundings in fashion unbecoming

to a Forsyte of the Victorian era, we may be sure that tribal instinct

was even then the prime force, and that "family" and the sense of home

and property counted as they do to this day, for all the recent efforts

to "talk them out."

So many people have written and claimed that their families were the

originals of the Forsytes that one has been almost encouraged to believe

in the typicality of an imagined species. Manners change and modes

evolve, and "Timothy's on the Bayswater Road" becomes a nest of the

unbelievable in all except essentials; we shall not look upon its like

again, nor perhaps on such a one as James or Old Jolyon. And yet the

figures of Insurance Societies and the utterances of Judges reassure us

daily that our earthly paradise is still a rich preserve, where the wild

raiders, Beauty and Passion, come stealing in, filching security from

beneath our noses. As surely as a dog will bark at a brass band, so will

the essential Soames in human nature ever rise up uneasily against the

dissolution which hovers round the folds of ownership.

"Let the dead Past bury its dead" would be a better saying if the Past

ever died. The persistence of the Past is one of those tragi-comic

blessings which each new age denies, coming cocksure on to the stage to

mouth its claim to a perfect novelty.

But no Age is so new as that! Human Nature, under its changing

pretensions and clothes, is and ever will be very much of a Forsyte, and

might, after all, be a much worse animal.

Looking back on the Victorian era, whose ripeness, decline, and

'fall-of' is in some sort pictured in "The Forsyte Saga," we see now

that we have but jumped out of a frying-pan into a fire. It would be

difficult to substantiate a claim that the case of England was better in

1913 than it was in 1886, when the Forsytes assembled at Old Jolyon's to

celebrate the engagement of June to Philip Bosinney. And in 1920, when

again the clan gathered to bless the marriage of Fleur with Michael

Mont, the state of England is as surely too molten and bankrupt as in

the eighties it was too congealed and low-percented. If these chronicles

had been a really scientific study of transition one would have dwelt

probably on such factors as the invention of bicycle, motor-car, and

flying-machine; the arrival of a cheap Press; the decline of country

life and increase of the towns; the birth of the Cinema. Men are, in

fact, quite unable to control their own inventions; they at best develop

adaptability to the new conditions those inventions create.

But this long tale is no scientific study of a period; it is rather an

intimate incarnation of the disturbance that Beauty effects in the lives

of men.

The figure of Irene, never, as the reader may possibly have observed,

present, except through the senses of other characters, is a concretion

of disturbing Beauty impinging on a possessive world.

One has noticed that readers, as they wade on through the salt waters of

the Saga, are inclined more and more to pity Soames, and to think that

in doing so they are in revolt against the mood of his creator. Far

from it! He, too, pities Soames, the tragedy of whose life is the very

simple, uncontrollable tragedy of being unlovable, without quite a thick

enough skin to be thoroughly unconscious of the fact. Not even Fleur

loves Soames as he feels he ought to be loved. But in pitying Soames,

readers incline, perhaps, to animus against Irene: After all, they

think, he wasn't a bad fellow, it wasn't his fault; she ought to have

forgiven him, and so on!

And, taking sides, they lose perception of the simple truth, which

underlies the whole story, that where sex attraction is utterly and

definitely lacking in one partner to a union, no amount of pity, or

reason, or duty, or what not, can overcome a repulsion implicit in

Nature. Whether it ought to, or no, is beside the point; because in fact

it never does. And where Irene seems hard and cruel, as in the Bois de

Boulogne, or the Goupenor Gallery, she is but wisely realistic--knowing

that the least concession is the inch which precedes the impossible, the

repulsive ell.

A criticism one might pass on the last phase of the Saga is the

complaint that Irene and Jolyon those rebels against property--claim

spiritual property in their son Jon. But it would be hypercriticism,

as the tale is told. No father and mother could have let the boy marry

Fleur without knowledge of the facts; and the facts determine Jon, not

the persuasion of his parents. Moreover, Jolyon's persuasion is not

on his own account, but on Irene's, and Irene's persuasion becomes a

reiterated: "Don't think of me, think of yourself!" That Jon, knowing

the facts, can realise his mother's feelings, will hardly with justice

be held proof that she is, after all, a Forsyte.

But though the impingement of Beauty and the claims of Freedom on a

possessive world are the main prepossessions of the Forsyte Saga, it

cannot be absolved from the charge of embalming the upper-middle class.

As the old Egyptians placed around their mummies the necessaries of a

future existence, so I have endeavoured to lay beside the figures of

Aunts Ann and Juley and Hester, of Timothy and Swithin, of Old Jolyon

and James, and of their sons, that which shall guarantee them a little

life here-after, a little balm in the hurried Gilead of a dissolving

"Progress."

If the upper-middle class, with other classes, is destined to "move on"

into amorphism, here, pickled in these pages, it lies under glass for

strollers in the wide and ill-arranged museum of Letters. Here it rests,

preserved in its own juice: The Sense of Property. 1922.\_

THE MAN OF PROPERTY

by JOHN GALSWORTHY

"........You will answer

The slaves are ours....."

--Merchant of Venice.

TO EDWARD GARNETT

PART I

CHAPTER I--'AT HOME' AT OLD JOLYON'S

Those privileged to be present at a family festival of the Forsytes have

seen that charming and instructive sight--an upper middle-class family

in full plumage. But whosoever of these favoured persons has possessed

the gift of psychological analysis (a talent without monetary value and

properly ignored by the Forsytes), has witnessed a spectacle, not only

delightful in itself, but illustrative of an obscure human problem. In

plainer words, he has gleaned from a gathering of this family--no branch

of which had a liking for the other, between no three members of whom

existed anything worthy of the name of sympathy--evidence of that

mysterious concrete tenacity which renders a family so formidable a unit

of society, so clear a reproduction of society in miniature. He has been

admitted to a vision of the dim roads of social progress, has understood

something of patriarchal life, of the swarmings of savage hordes, of the

rise and fall of nations. He is like one who, having watched a tree

grow from its planting--a paragon of tenacity, insulation, and success,

amidst the deaths of a hundred other plants less fibrous, sappy, and

persistent--one day will see it flourishing with bland, full foliage, in

an almost repugnant prosperity, at the summit of its efflorescence.

On June 15, eighteen eighty-six, about four of the afternoon, the

observer who chanced to be present at the house of old Jolyon Forsyte

in Stanhope Gate, might have seen the highest efflorescence of the

Forsytes.

This was the occasion of an 'at home' to celebrate the engagement of

Miss June Forsyte, old Jolyon's granddaughter, to Mr. Philip Bosinney.

In the bravery of light gloves, buff waistcoats, feathers and frocks,

the family were present, even Aunt Ann, who now but seldom left the

corner of her brother Timothy's green drawing-room, where, under the

aegis of a plume of dyed pampas grass in a light blue vase, she sat

all day reading and knitting, surrounded by the effigies of three

generations of Forsytes. Even Aunt Ann was there; her inflexible

back, and the dignity of her calm old face personifying the rigid

possessiveness of the family idea.

When a Forsyte was engaged, married, or born, the Forsytes were present;

when a Forsyte died--but no Forsyte had as yet died; they did not die;

death being contrary to their principles, they took precautions against

it, the instinctive precautions of highly vitalized persons who resent

encroachments on their property.

About the Forsytes mingling that day with the crowd of other guests,

there was a more than ordinarily groomed look, an alert, inquisitive

assurance, a brilliant respectability, as though they were attired in

defiance of something. The habitual sniff on the face of Soames Forsyte

had spread through their ranks; they were on their guard.

The subconscious offensiveness of their attitude has constituted old

Jolyon's 'home' the psychological moment of the family history, made it

the prelude of their drama.

The Forsytes were resentful of something, not individually, but as

a family; this resentment expressed itself in an added perfection of

raiment, an exuberance of family cordiality, an exaggeration of family

importance, and--the sniff. Danger--so indispensable in bringing out the

fundamental quality of any society, group, or individual--was what

the Forsytes scented; the premonition of danger put a burnish on their

armour. For the first time, as a family, they appeared to have an

instinct of being in contact, with some strange and unsafe thing.

Over against the piano a man of bulk and stature was wearing two

waistcoats on his wide chest, two waistcoats and a ruby pin, instead of

the single satin waistcoat and diamond pin of more usual occasions,

and his shaven, square, old face, the colour of pale leather, with

pale eyes, had its most dignified look, above his satin stock. This was

Swithin Forsyte. Close to the window, where he could get more than his

fair share of fresh air, the other twin, James--the fat and the lean of

it, old Jolyon called these brothers--like the bulky Swithin, over six

feet in height, but very lean, as though destined from his birth to

strike a balance and maintain an average, brooded over the scene with

his permanent stoop; his grey eyes had an air of fixed absorption in

some secret worry, broken at intervals by a rapid, shifting scrutiny

of surrounding facts; his cheeks, thinned by two parallel folds, and a

long, clean-shaven upper lip, were framed within Dundreary whiskers. In

his hands he turned and turned a piece of china. Not far off, listening

to a lady in brown, his only son Soames, pale and well-shaved,

dark-haired, rather bald, had poked his chin up sideways, carrying his

nose with that aforesaid appearance of 'sniff,' as though despising an

egg which he knew he could not digest. Behind him his cousin, the tall

George, son of the fifth Forsyte, Roger, had a Quilpish look on his

fleshy face, pondering one of his sardonic jests. Something inherent to

the occasion had affected them all.

Seated in a row close to one another were three ladies--Aunts Ann,

Hester (the two Forsyte maids), and Juley (short for Julia), who not in

first youth had so far forgotten herself as to marry Septimus Small, a

man of poor constitution. She had survived him for many years. With

her elder and younger sister she lived now in the house of Timothy, her

sixth and youngest brother, on the Bayswater Road. Each of these ladies

held fans in their hands, and each with some touch of colour,

some emphatic feather or brooch, testified to the solemnity of the

opportunity.

In the centre of the room, under the chandelier, as became a host, stood

the head of the family, old Jolyon himself. Eighty years of age, with

his fine, white hair, his dome-like forehead, his little, dark grey

eyes, and an immense white moustache, which drooped and spread below the

level of his strong jaw, he had a patriarchal look, and in spite of lean

cheeks and hollows at his temples, seemed master of perennial youth.

He held himself extremely upright, and his shrewd, steady eyes had lost

none of their clear shining. Thus he gave an impression of superiority

to the doubts and dislikes of smaller men. Having had his own way for

innumerable years, he had earned a prescriptive right to it. It would

never have occurred to old Jolyon that it was necessary to wear a look

of doubt or of defiance.

Between him and the four other brothers who were present, James,

Swithin, Nicholas, and Roger, there was much difference, much

similarity. In turn, each of these four brothers was very different from

the other, yet they, too, were alike.

Through the varying features and expression of those five faces could be

marked a certain steadfastness of chin, underlying surface distinctions,

marking a racial stamp, too prehistoric to trace, too remote and

permanent to discuss--the very hall-mark and guarantee of the family

fortunes.

Among the younger generation, in the tall, bull-like George, in pallid

strenuous Archibald, in young Nicholas with his sweet and tentative

obstinacy, in the grave and foppishly determined Eustace, there was

this same stamp--less meaningful perhaps, but unmistakable--a sign of

something ineradicable in the family soul. At one time or another during

the afternoon, all these faces, so dissimilar and so alike, had worn

an expression of distrust, the object of which was undoubtedly the man

whose acquaintance they were thus assembled to make. Philip Bosinney was

known to be a young man without fortune, but Forsyte girls had become

engaged to such before, and had actually married them. It was not

altogether for this reason, therefore, that the minds of the Forsytes

misgave them. They could not have explained the origin of a misgiving

obscured by the mist of family gossip. A story was undoubtedly told that

he had paid his duty call to Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester, in a soft

grey hat--a soft grey hat, not even a new one--a dusty thing with a

shapeless crown. "So, extraordinary, my dear--so odd," Aunt Hester,

passing through the little, dark hall (she was rather short-sighted),

had tried to 'shoo' it off a chair, taking it for a strange,

disreputable cat--Tommy had such disgraceful friends! She was disturbed

when it did not move.

Like an artist for ever seeking to discover the significant trifle which

embodies the whole character of a scene, or place, or person, so those

unconscious artists--the Forsytes had fastened by intuition on this hat;

it was their significant trifle, the detail in which was embedded the

meaning of the whole matter; for each had asked himself: "Come, now,

should I have paid that visit in that hat?" and each had answered "No!"

and some, with more imagination than others, had added: "It would never

have come into my head!"

George, on hearing the story, grinned. The hat had obviously been

worn as a practical joke! He himself was a connoisseur of such. "Very

haughty!" he said, "the wild Buccaneer."

And this mot, the 'Buccaneer,' was bandied from mouth to mouth, till it

became the favourite mode of alluding to Bosinney.

Her aunts reproached June afterwards about the hat.

"We don't think you ought to let him, dear!" they had said.

June had answered in her imperious brisk way, like the little embodiment

of will she was: "Oh! what does it matter? Phil never knows what he's

got on!"

No one had credited an answer so outrageous. A man not to know what he

had on? No, no! What indeed was this young man, who, in becoming

engaged to June, old Jolyon's acknowledged heiress, had done so well

for himself? He was an architect, not in itself a sufficient reason for

wearing such a hat. None of the Forsytes happened to be architects, but

one of them knew two architects who would never have worn such a hat

upon a call of ceremony in the London season.

Dangerous--ah, dangerous! June, of course, had not seen this, but,

though not yet nineteen, she was notorious. Had she not said to Mrs.

Soames--who was always so beautifully dressed--that feathers were

vulgar? Mrs. Soames had actually given up wearing feathers, so

dreadfully downright was dear June!

These misgivings, this disapproval, and perfectly genuine distrust, did

not prevent the Forsytes from gathering to old Jolyon's invitation. An

'At Home' at Stanhope Gate was a great rarity; none had been held for

twelve years, not indeed, since old Mrs. Jolyon had died.

Never had there been so full an assembly, for, mysteriously united in

spite of all their differences, they had taken arms against a common

peril. Like cattle when a dog comes into the field, they stood head

to head and shoulder to shoulder, prepared to run upon and trample the

invader to death. They had come, too, no doubt, to get some notion of

what sort of presents they would ultimately be expected to give; for

though the question of wedding gifts was usually graduated in this way:

'What are you givin'? Nicholas is givin' spoons!'--so very much depended

on the bridegroom. If he were sleek, well-brushed, prosperous-looking,

it was more necessary to give him nice things; he would expect them.

In the end each gave exactly what was right and proper, by a species

of family adjustment arrived at as prices are arrived at on the Stock

Exchange--the exact niceties being regulated at Timothy's commodious,

red-brick residence in Bayswater, overlooking the Park, where dwelt

Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester.

The uneasiness of the Forsyte family has been justified by the simple

mention of the hat. How impossible and wrong would it have been for any

family, with the regard for appearances which should ever characterize

the great upper middle-class, to feel otherwise than uneasy!

The author of the uneasiness stood talking to June by the further door;

his curly hair had a rumpled appearance, as though he found what was

going on around him unusual. He had an air, too, of having a joke all to

himself. George, speaking aside to his brother, Eustace, said:

"Looks as if he might make a bolt of it--the dashing Buccaneer!"

This 'very singular-looking man,' as Mrs. Small afterwards called

him, was of medium height and strong build, with a pale, brown face, a

dust-coloured moustache, very prominent cheek-bones, and hollow checks.

His forehead sloped back towards the crown of his head, and bulged out

in bumps over the eyes, like foreheads seen in the Lion-house at the

Zoo. He had sherry-coloured eyes, disconcertingly inattentive at times.

Old Jolyon's coachman, after driving June and Bosinney to the theatre,

had remarked to the butler:

"I dunno what to make of 'im. Looks to me for all the world like an

'alf-tame leopard." And every now and then a Forsyte would come up,

sidle round, and take a look at him.

June stood in front, fending off this idle curiosity--a little bit of a

thing, as somebody once said, 'all hair and spirit,' with fearless blue

eyes, a firm jaw, and a bright colour, whose face and body seemed too

slender for her crown of red-gold hair.

A tall woman, with a beautiful figure, which some member of the family

had once compared to a heathen goddess, stood looking at these two with

a shadowy smile.

Her hands, gloved in French grey, were crossed one over the other, her

grave, charming face held to one side, and the eyes of all men near were

fastened on it. Her figure swayed, so balanced that the very air seemed

to set it moving. There was warmth, but little colour, in her cheeks;

her large, dark eyes were soft.

But it was at her lips--asking a question, giving an answer, with that

shadowy smile--that men looked; they were sensitive lips, sensuous

and sweet, and through them seemed to come warmth and perfume like the

warmth and perfume of a flower.

The engaged couple thus scrutinized were unconscious of this passive

goddess. It was Bosinney who first noticed her, and asked her name.

June took her lover up to the woman with the beautiful figure.

"Irene is my greatest chum," she said: "Please be good friends, you

two!"

At the little lady's command they all three smiled; and while they were

smiling, Soames Forsyte, silently appearing from behind the woman with

the beautiful figure, who was his wife, said:

"Ah! introduce me too!"

He was seldom, indeed, far from Irene's side at public functions, and

even when separated by the exigencies of social intercourse, could

be seen following her about with his eyes, in which were strange

expressions of watchfulness and longing.

At the window his father, James, was still scrutinizing the marks on the

piece of china.

"I wonder at Jolyon's allowing this engagement," he said to Aunt Ann.

"They tell me there's no chance of their getting married for years.

This young Bosinney" (he made the word a dactyl in opposition to general

usage of a short o) "has got nothing. When Winifred married Dartie, I

made him bring every penny into settlement--lucky thing, too--they'd ha'

had nothing by this time!"

Aunt Ann looked up from her velvet chair. Grey curls banded her

forehead, curls that, unchanged for decades, had extinguished in the

family all sense of time. She made no reply, for she rarely spoke,

husbanding her aged voice; but to James, uneasy of conscience, her look

was as good as an answer.

"Well," he said, "I couldn't help Irene's having no money. Soames was in

such a hurry; he got quite thin dancing attendance on her."

Putting the bowl pettishly down on the piano, he let his eyes wander to

the group by the door.

"It's my opinion," he said unexpectedly, "that it's just as well as it

is."

Aunt Ann did not ask him to explain this strange utterance. She knew

what he was thinking. If Irene had no money she would not be so foolish

as to do anything wrong; for they said--they said--she had been asking

for a separate room; but, of course, Soames had not....

James interrupted her reverie:

"But where," he asked, "was Timothy? Hadn't he come with them?"

Through Aunt Ann's compressed lips a tender smile forced its way:

"No, he didn't think it wise, with so much of this diphtheria about; and

he so liable to take things."

James answered:

"Well, HE takes good care of himself. I can't afford to take the care of

myself that he does."

Nor was it easy to say which, of admiration, envy, or contempt, was

dominant in that remark.

Timothy, indeed, was seldom seen. The baby of the family, a publisher

by profession, he had some years before, when business was at full tide,

scented out the stagnation which, indeed, had not yet come, but which

ultimately, as all agreed, was bound to set in, and, selling his share

in a firm engaged mainly in the production of religious books, had

invested the quite conspicuous proceeds in three per cent. consols. By

this act he had at once assumed an isolated position, no other Forsyte

being content with less than four per cent. for his money; and this

isolation had slowly and surely undermined a spirit perhaps better than

commonly endowed with caution. He had become almost a myth--a kind of

incarnation of security haunting the background of the Forsyte universe.

He had never committed the imprudence of marrying, or encumbering

himself in any way with children.

James resumed, tapping the piece of china:

"This isn't real old Worcester. I s'pose Jolyon's told you something

about the young man. From all I can learn, he's got no business,

no income, and no connection worth speaking of; but then, I know

nothing--nobody tells me anything."

Aunt Ann shook her head. Over her square-chinned, aquiline old face a

trembling passed; the spidery fingers of her hands pressed against each

other and interlaced, as though she were subtly recharging her will.

The eldest by some years of all the Forsytes, she held a peculiar

position amongst them. Opportunists and egotists one and all--though

not, indeed, more so than their neighbours--they quailed before her

incorruptible figure, and, when opportunities were too strong, what

could they do but avoid her!

Twisting his long, thin legs, James went on:

"Jolyon, he will have his own way. He's got no children"--and stopped,

recollecting the continued existence of old Jolyon's son, young Jolyon,

June's father, who had made such a mess of it, and done for himself

by deserting his wife and child and running away with that foreign

governess. "Well," he resumed hastily, "if he likes to do these things,

I s'pose he can afford to. Now, what's he going to give her? I s'pose

he'll give her a thousand a year; he's got nobody else to leave his

money to."

He stretched out his hand to meet that of a dapper, clean-shaven man,

with hardly a hair on his head, a long, broken nose, full lips, and cold

grey eyes under rectangular brows.

"Well, Nick," he muttered, "how are you?"

Nicholas Forsyte, with his bird-like rapidity and the look of a

preternaturally sage schoolboy (he had made a large fortune, quite

legitimately, out of the companies of which he was a director), placed

within that cold palm the tips of his still colder fingers and hastily

withdrew them.

"I'm bad," he said, pouting--"been bad all the week; don't sleep at

night. The doctor can't tell why. He's a clever fellow, or I shouldn't

have him, but I get nothing out of him but bills."

"Doctors!" said James, coming down sharp on his words: "I've had all the

doctors in London for one or another of us. There's no satisfaction to

be got out of them; they'll tell you anything. There's Swithin, now.

What good have they done him? There he is; he's bigger than ever; he's

enormous; they can't get his weight down. Look at him!"

Swithin Forsyte, tall, square, and broad, with a chest like a pouter

pigeon's in its plumage of bright waistcoats, came strutting towards

them.

"Er--how are you?" he said in his dandified way, aspirating the 'h'

strongly (this difficult letter was almost absolutely safe in his

keeping)--"how are you?"

Each brother wore an air of aggravation as he looked at the other two,

knowing by experience that they would try to eclipse his ailments.

"We were just saying," said James, "that you don't get any thinner."

Swithin protruded his pale round eyes with the effort of hearing.

"Thinner? I'm in good case," he said, leaning a little forward, "not one

of your thread-papers like you!"

But, afraid of losing the expansion of his chest, he leaned back

again into a state of immobility, for he prized nothing so highly as a

distinguished appearance.

Aunt Ann turned her old eyes from one to the other. Indulgent and severe

was her look. In turn the three brothers looked at Ann. She was getting

shaky. Wonderful woman! Eighty-six if a day; might live another ten

years, and had never been strong. Swithin and James, the twins, were

only seventy-five, Nicholas a mere baby of seventy or so. All were

strong, and the inference was comforting. Of all forms of property their

respective healths naturally concerned them most.

"I'm very well in myself," proceeded James, "but my nerves are out of

order. The least thing worries me to death. I shall have to go to Bath."

"Bath!" said Nicholas. "I've tried Harrogate. That's no good. What I

want is sea air. There's nothing like Yarmouth. Now, when I go there I

sleep...."

"My liver's very bad," interrupted Swithin slowly. "Dreadful pain here;"

and he placed his hand on his right side.

"Want of exercise," muttered James, his eyes on the china. He quickly

added: "I get a pain there, too."

Swithin reddened, a resemblance to a turkey-cock coming upon his old

face.

"Exercise!" he said. "I take plenty: I never use the lift at the Club."

"I didn't know," James hurried out. "I know nothing about anybody;

nobody tells me anything...."

Swithin fixed him with a stare:

"What do you do for a pain there?"

James brightened.

"I take a compound...."

"How are you, uncle?"

June stood before him, her resolute small face raised from her little

height to his great height, and her hand outheld.

The brightness faded from James's visage.

"How are you?" he said, brooding over her. "So you're going to Wales

to-morrow to visit your young man's aunts? You'll have a lot of rain

there. This isn't real old Worcester." He tapped the bowl. "Now, that

set I gave your mother when she married was the genuine thing."

June shook hands one by one with her three great-uncles, and turned

to Aunt Ann. A very sweet look had come into the old lady's face, she

kissed the girl's check with trembling fervour.

"Well, my dear," she said, "and so you're going for a whole month!"

The girl passed on, and Aunt Ann looked after her slim little figure.

The old lady's round, steel grey eyes, over which a film like a bird's

was beginning to come, followed her wistfully amongst the bustling

crowd, for people were beginning to say good-bye; and her finger-tips,

pressing and pressing against each other, were busy again with the

recharging of her will against that inevitable ultimate departure of her

own.

'Yes,' she thought, 'everybody's been most kind; quite a lot of people

come to congratulate her. She ought to be very happy.' Amongst the

throng of people by the door, the well-dressed throng drawn from the

families of lawyers and doctors, from the Stock Exchange, and all the

innumerable avocations of the upper-middle class--there were only

some twenty percent of Forsytes; but to Aunt Ann they seemed all

Forsytes--and certainly there was not much difference--she saw only

her own flesh and blood. It was her world, this family, and she knew

no other, had never perhaps known any other. All their little secrets,

illnesses, engagements, and marriages, how they were getting on, and

whether they were making money--all this was her property, her delight,

her life; beyond this only a vague, shadowy mist of facts and persons of

no real significance. This it was that she would have to lay down when

it came to her turn to die; this which gave to her that importance, that

secret self-importance, without which none of us can bear to live; and

to this she clung wistfully, with a greed that grew each day! If life

were slipping away from her, this she would retain to the end.

She thought of June's father, young Jolyon, who had run away with that

foreign girl. And what a sad blow to his father and to them all. Such

a promising young fellow! A sad blow, though there had been no public

scandal, most fortunately, Jo's wife seeking for no divorce! A long time

ago! And when June's mother died, six years ago, Jo had married that

woman, and they had two children now, so she had heard. Still, he

had forfeited his right to be there, had cheated her of the complete

fulfilment of her family pride, deprived her of the rightful pleasure of

seeing and kissing him of whom she had been so proud, such a

promising young fellow! The thought rankled with the bitterness of a

long-inflicted injury in her tenacious old heart. A little water stood

in her eyes. With a handkerchief of the finest lawn she wiped them

stealthily.

"Well, Aunt Ann?" said a voice behind.

Soames Forsyte, flat-shouldered, clean-shaven, flat-cheeked,

flat-waisted, yet with something round and secret about his whole

appearance, looked downwards and aslant at Aunt Ann, as though trying to

see through the side of his own nose.

"And what do you think of the engagement?" he asked.

Aunt Ann's eyes rested on him proudly; of all the nephews since young

Jolyon's departure from the family nest, he was now her favourite, for

she recognised in him a sure trustee of the family soul that must so

soon slip beyond her keeping.

"Very nice for the young man," she said; "and he's a good-looking young

fellow; but I doubt if he's quite the right lover for dear June."

Soames touched the edge of a gold-lacquered lustre.

"She'll tame him," he said, stealthily wetting his finger and rubbing

it on the knobby bulbs. "That's genuine old lacquer; you can't get it

nowadays. It'd do well in a sale at Jobson's." He spoke with relish, as

though he felt that he was cheering up his old aunt. It was seldom he

was so confidential. "I wouldn't mind having it myself," he added; "you

can always get your price for old lacquer."

"You're so clever with all those things," said Aunt Ann. "And how is

dear Irene?"

Soames's smile died.

"Pretty well," he said. "Complains she can't sleep; she sleeps a great

deal better than I do," and he looked at his wife, who was talking to

Bosinney by the door.

Aunt Ann sighed.

"Perhaps," she said, "it will be just as well for her not to see so much

of June. She's such a decided character, dear June!"

Soames flushed; his flushes passed rapidly over his flat cheeks and

centered between his eyes, where they remained, the stamp of disturbing

thoughts.

"I don't know what she sees in that little flibbertigibbet," he burst

out, but noticing that they were no longer alone, he turned and again

began examining the lustre.

"They tell me Jolyon's bought another house," said his father's voice

close by; "he must have a lot of money--he must have more money than he

knows what to do with! Montpellier Square, they say; close to Soames!

They never told me, Irene never tells me anything!"

"Capital position, not two minutes from me," said the voice of Swithin,

"and from my rooms I can drive to the Club in eight."

The position of their houses was of vital importance to the Forsytes,

nor was this remarkable, since the whole spirit of their success was

embodied therein.

Their father, of farming stock, had come from Dorsetshire near the

beginning of the century.

'Superior Dosset Forsyte, as he was called by his intimates, had been a

stonemason by trade, and risen to the position of a master-builder.

Towards the end of his life he moved to London, where, building on until

he died, he was buried at Highgate. He left over thirty thousand pounds

between his ten children. Old Jolyon alluded to him, if at all, as 'A

hard, thick sort of man; not much refinement about him.' The second

generation of Forsytes felt indeed that he was not greatly to their

credit. The only aristocratic trait they could find in his character was

a habit of drinking Madeira.

Aunt Hester, an authority on family history, described him thus: "I

don't recollect that he ever did anything; at least, not in my time. He

was er--an owner of houses, my dear. His hair about your Uncle Swithin's

colour; rather a square build. Tall? No--not very tall" (he had been

five feet five, with a mottled face); "a fresh-coloured man. I remember

he used to drink Madeira; but ask your Aunt Ann. What was his father?

He--er--had to do with the land down in Dorsetshire, by the sea."

James once went down to see for himself what sort of place this was that

they had come from. He found two old farms, with a cart track rutted

into the pink earth, leading down to a mill by the beach; a little grey

church with a buttressed outer wall, and a smaller and greyer chapel.

The stream which worked the mill came bubbling down in a dozen rivulets,

and pigs were hunting round that estuary. A haze hovered over the

prospect. Down this hollow, with their feet deep in the mud and their

faces towards the sea, it appeared that the primeval Forsytes had been

content to walk Sunday after Sunday for hundreds of years.

Whether or no James had cherished hopes of an inheritance, or of

something rather distinguished to be found down there, he came back to

town in a poor way, and went about with a pathetic attempt at making the

best of a bad job.

"There's very little to be had out of that," he said; "regular country

little place, old as the hills...."

Its age was felt to be a comfort. Old Jolyon, in whom a desperate

honesty welled up at times, would allude to his ancestors as: "Yeomen--I

suppose very small beer." Yet he would repeat the word 'yeomen' as if it

afforded him consolation.

They had all done so well for themselves, these Forsytes, that they were

all what is called 'of a certain position.' They had shares in all sorts

of things, not as yet--with the exception of Timothy--in consols, for

they had no dread in life like that of 3 per cent. for their money.

They collected pictures, too, and were supporters of such charitable

institutions as might be beneficial to their sick domestics. From their

father, the builder, they inherited a talent for bricks and mortar.

Originally, perhaps, members of some primitive sect, they were now

in the natural course of things members of the Church of England, and

caused their wives and children to attend with some regularity the

more fashionable churches of the Metropolis. To have doubted their

Christianity would have caused them both pain and surprise. Some of them

paid for pews, thus expressing in the most practical form their sympathy

with the teachings of Christ.

Their residences, placed at stated intervals round the park, watched

like sentinels, lest the fair heart of this London, where their desires

were fixed, should slip from their clutches, and leave them lower in

their own estimations.

There was old Jolyon in Stanhope Place; the Jameses in Park Lane;

Swithin in the lonely glory of orange and blue chambers in Hyde Park

Mansions--he had never married, not he--the Soamses in their nest off

Knightsbridge; the Rogers in Prince's Gardens (Roger was that remarkable

Forsyte who had conceived and carried out the notion of bringing up his

four sons to a new profession. "Collect house property, nothing like

it," he would say; "I never did anything else").

The Haymans again--Mrs. Hayman was the one married Forsyte sister--in a

house high up on Campden Hill, shaped like a giraffe, and so tall that

it gave the observer a crick in the neck; the Nicholases in Ladbroke

Grove, a spacious abode and a great bargain; and last, but not least,

Timothy's on the Bayswater Road, where Ann, and Juley, and Hester, lived

under his protection.

But all this time James was musing, and now he inquired of his host

and brother what he had given for that house in Montpellier Square. He

himself had had his eye on a house there for the last two years, but

they wanted such a price.

Old Jolyon recounted the details of his purchase.

"Twenty-two years to run?" repeated James; "The very house I was

after--you've given too much for it!"

Old Jolyon frowned.

"It's not that I want it," said James hastily; "it wouldn't suit my

purpose at that price. Soames knows the house, well--he'll tell you it's

too dear--his opinion's worth having."

"I don't," said old Jolyon, "care a fig for his opinion."

"Well," murmured James, "you will have your own way--it's a good

opinion. Good-bye! We're going to drive down to Hurlingham. They tell

me June's going to Wales. You'll be lonely tomorrow. What'll you do with

yourself? You'd better come and dine with us!"

Old Jolyon refused. He went down to the front door and saw them into

their barouche, and twinkled at them, having already forgotten his

spleen--Mrs. James facing the horses, tall and majestic with auburn

hair; on her left, Irene--the two husbands, father and son, sitting

forward, as though they expected something, opposite their wives.

Bobbing and bounding upon the spring cushions, silent, swaying to each

motion of their chariot, old Jolyon watched them drive away under the

sunlight.

During the drive the silence was broken by Mrs. James.

"Did you ever see such a collection of rumty-too people?"

Soames, glancing at her beneath his eyelids, nodded, and he saw Irene

steal at him one of her unfathomable looks. It is likely enough that

each branch of the Forsyte family made that remark as they drove away

from old Jolyon's 'At Home!'

Amongst the last of the departing guests the fourth and fifth brothers,

Nicholas and Roger, walked away together, directing their steps

alongside Hyde Park towards the Praed Street Station of the Underground.

Like all other Forsytes of a certain age they kept carriages of their

own, and never took cabs if by any means they could avoid it.

The day was bright, the trees of the Park in the full beauty of

mid-June foliage; the brothers did not seem to notice phenomena,

which contributed, nevertheless, to the jauntiness of promenade and

conversation.

"Yes," said Roger, "she's a good-lookin' woman, that wife of Soames's.

I'm told they don't get on."

This brother had a high forehead, and the freshest colour of any of the

Forsytes; his light grey eyes measured the street frontage of the houses

by the way, and now and then he would level his, umbrella and take a

'lunar,' as he expressed it, of the varying heights.

"She'd no money," replied Nicholas.

He himself had married a good deal of money, of which, it being then the

golden age before the Married Women's Property Act, he had mercifully

been enabled to make a successful use.

"What was her father?"

"Heron was his name, a Professor, so they tell me."

Roger shook his head.

"There's no money in that," he said.

"They say her mother's father was cement."

Roger's face brightened.

"But he went bankrupt," went on Nicholas.

"Ah!" exclaimed Roger, "Soames will have trouble with her; you mark my

words, he'll have trouble--she's got a foreign look."

Nicholas licked his lips.

"She's a pretty woman," and he waved aside a crossing-sweeper.

"How did he get hold of her?" asked Roger presently. "She must cost him

a pretty penny in dress!"

"Ann tells me," replied Nicholas, "he was half-cracked about her. She

refused him five times. James, he's nervous about it, I can see."

"Ah!" said Roger again; "I'm sorry for James; he had trouble with

Dartie." His pleasant colour was heightened by exercise, he swung his

umbrella to the level of his eye more frequently than ever. Nicholas's

face also wore a pleasant look.

"Too pale for me," he said, "but her figures capital!"

Roger made no reply.

"I call her distinguished-looking," he said at last--it was the highest

praise in the Forsyte vocabulary. "That young Bosinney will never do

any good for himself. They say at Burkitt's he's one of these artistic

chaps--got an idea of improving English architecture; there's no money

in that! I should like to hear what Timothy would say to it."

They entered the station.

"What class are you going? I go second."

"No second for me," said Nicholas;--"you never know what you may catch."

He took a first-class ticket to Notting Hill Gate; Roger a second to

South Kensington. The train coming in a minute later, the two brothers

parted and entered their respective compartments. Each felt aggrieved

that the other had not modified his habits to secure his society a

little longer; but as Roger voiced it in his thoughts:

'Always a stubborn beggar, Nick!'

And as Nicholas expressed it to himself:

'Cantankerous chap Roger--always was!'

There was little sentimentality about the Forsytes. In that great

London, which they had conquered and become merged in, what time had

they to be sentimental?

CHAPTER II--OLD JOLYON GOES TO THE OPERA

At five o'clock the following day old Jolyon sat alone, a cigar between

his lips, and on a table by his side a cup of tea. He was tired, and

before he had finished his cigar he fell asleep. A fly settled on his

hair, his breathing sounded heavy in the drowsy silence, his upper lip

under the white moustache puffed in and out. From between the fingers

of his veined and wrinkled hand the cigar, dropping on the empty hearth,

burned itself out.

The gloomy little study, with windows of stained glass to exclude the

view, was full of dark green velvet and heavily-carved mahogany--a suite

of which old Jolyon was wont to say: 'Shouldn't wonder if it made a big

price some day!'

It was pleasant to think that in the after life he could get more for

things than he had given.

In the rich brown atmosphere peculiar to back rooms in the mansion of

a Forsyte, the Rembrandtesque effect of his great head, with its white

hair, against the cushion of his high-backed seat, was spoiled by the

moustache, which imparted a somewhat military look to his face. An old

clock that had been with him since before his marriage forty years ago

kept with its ticking a jealous record of the seconds slipping away

forever from its old master.

He had never cared for this room, hardly going into it from one year's

end to another, except to take cigars from the Japanese cabinet in the

corner, and the room now had its revenge.

His temples, curving like thatches over the hollows beneath, his

cheek-bones and chin, all were sharpened in his sleep, and there had

come upon his face the confession that he was an old man.

He woke. June had gone! James had said he would be lonely. James had

always been a poor thing. He recollected with satisfaction that he had

bought that house over James's head.

Serve him right for sticking at the price; the only thing the fellow

thought of was money. Had he given too much, though? It wanted a lot of

doing to--He dared say he would want all his money before he had

done with this affair of June's. He ought never to have allowed the

engagement. She had met this Bosinney at the house of Baynes, Baynes and

Bildeboy, the architects. He believed that Baynes, whom he knew--a bit

of an old woman--was the young man's uncle by marriage. After that she'd

been always running after him; and when she took a thing into her head

there was no stopping her. She was continually taking up with 'lame

ducks' of one sort or another. This fellow had no money, but she must

needs become engaged to him--a harumscarum, unpractical chap, who would

get himself into no end of difficulties.

She had come to him one day in her slap-dash way and told him; and, as

if it were any consolation, she had added:

"He's so splendid; he's often lived on cocoa for a week!"

"And he wants you to live on cocoa too?"

"Oh no; he is getting into the swim now."

Old Jolyon had taken his cigar from under his white moustaches, stained

by coffee at the edge, and looked at her, that little slip of a thing

who had got such a grip of his heart. He knew more about 'swims' than

his granddaughter. But she, having clasped her hands on his knees,

rubbed her chin against him, making a sound like a purring cat. And,

knocking the ash off his cigar, he had exploded in nervous desperation:

"You're all alike: you won't be satisfied till you've got what you want.

If you must come to grief, you must; I wash my hands of it."

So, he had washed his hands of it, making the condition that they should

not marry until Bosinney had at least four hundred a year.

"I shan't be able to give you very much," he had said, a formula to

which June was not unaccustomed. "Perhaps this What's-his-name will

provide the cocoa."

He had hardly seen anything of her since it began. A bad business! He

had no notion of giving her a lot of money to enable a fellow he knew

nothing about to live on in idleness. He had seen that sort of thing

before; no good ever came of it. Worst of all, he had no hope of shaking

her resolution; she was as obstinate as a mule, always had been from

a child. He didn't see where it was to end. They must cut their coat

according to their cloth. He would not give way till he saw young

Bosinney with an income of his own. That June would have trouble with

the fellow was as plain as a pikestaff; he had no more idea of money

than a cow. As to this rushing down to Wales to visit the young man's

aunts, he fully expected they were old cats.

And, motionless, old Jolyon stared at the wall; but for his open eyes,

he might have been asleep.... The idea of supposing that young cub

Soames could give him advice! He had always been a cub, with his nose in

the air! He would be setting up as a man of property next, with a place

in the country! A man of property! H'mph! Like his father, he was always

nosing out bargains, a cold-blooded young beggar!

He rose, and, going to the cabinet, began methodically stocking his

cigar-case from a bundle fresh in. They were not bad at the price, but

you couldn't get a good cigar, nowadays, nothing to hold a candle to

those old Superfinos of Hanson and Bridger's. That was a cigar!

The thought, like some stealing perfume, carried him back to those

wonderful nights at Richmond when after dinner he sat smoking on the

terrace of the Crown and Sceptre with Nicholas Treffry and Traquair and

Jack Herring and Anthony Thornworthy. How good his cigars were then!

Poor old Nick!--dead, and Jack Herring--dead, and Traquair--dead of

that wife of his, and Thornworthy--awfully shaky (no wonder, with his

appetite).

Of all the company of those days he himself alone seemed left, except

Swithin, of course, and he so outrageously big there was no doing

anything with him.

Difficult to believe it was so long ago; he felt young still! Of all

his thoughts, as he stood there counting his cigars, this was the most

poignant, the most bitter. With his white head and his loneliness he

had remained young and green at heart. And those Sunday afternoons on

Hampstead Heath, when young Jolyon and he went for a stretch along the

Spaniard's Road to Highgate, to Child's Hill, and back over the Heath

again to dine at Jack Straw's Castle--how delicious his cigars were

then! And such weather! There was no weather now.

When June was a toddler of five, and every other Sunday he took her to

the Zoo, away from the society of those two good women, her mother and

her grandmother, and at the top of the bear den baited his umbrella with

buns for her favourite bears, how sweet his cigars were then!

Cigars! He had not even succeeded in out-living his palate--the famous

palate that in the fifties men swore by, and speaking of him, said:

"Forsyte's the best palate in London!" The palate that in a sense had

made his fortune--the fortune of the celebrated tea men, Forsyte and

Treffry, whose tea, like no other man's tea, had a romantic aroma, the

charm of a quite singular genuineness. About the house of Forsyte and

Treffry in the City had clung an air of enterprise and mystery, of

special dealings in special ships, at special ports, with special

Orientals.

He had worked at that business! Men did work in those days! these young

pups hardly knew the meaning of the word. He had gone into every detail,

known everything that went on, sometimes sat up all night over it. And

he had always chosen his agents himself, prided himself on it. His eye

for men, he used to say, had been the secret of his success, and the

exercise of this masterful power of selection had been the only part of

it all that he had really liked. Not a career for a man of his ability.

Even now, when the business had been turned into a Limited Liability

Company, and was declining (he had got out of his shares long ago), he

felt a sharp chagrin in thinking of that time. How much better he might

have done! He would have succeeded splendidly at the Bar! He had even

thought of standing for Parliament. How often had not Nicholas Treffry

said to him:

"You could do anything, Jo, if you weren't so d-damned careful of

yourself!" Dear old Nick! Such a good fellow, but a racketty chap! The

notorious Treffry! He had never taken any care of himself. So he was

dead. Old Jolyon counted his cigars with a steady hand, and it came into

his mind to wonder if perhaps he had been too careful of himself.

He put the cigar-case in the breast of his coat, buttoned it in, and

walked up the long flights to his bedroom, leaning on one foot and the

other, and helping himself by the bannister. The house was too big.

After June was married, if she ever did marry this fellow, as he

supposed she would, he would let it and go into rooms. What was the use

of keeping half a dozen servants eating their heads off?

The butler came to the ring of his bell--a large man with a beard, a

soft tread, and a peculiar capacity for silence. Old Jolyon told him to

put his dress clothes out; he was going to dine at the Club.

How long had the carriage been back from taking Miss June to the

station? Since two? Then let him come round at half-past six!

The Club which old Jolyon entered on the stroke of seven was one of

those political institutions of the upper middle class which have seen

better days. In spite of being talked about, perhaps in consequence of

being talked about, it betrayed a disappointing vitality. People had

grown tired of saying that the 'Disunion' was on its last legs. Old

Jolyon would say it, too, yet disregarded the fact in a manner truly

irritating to well-constituted Clubmen.

"Why do you keep your name on?" Swithin often asked him with profound

vexation. "Why don't you join the 'Polyglot'? You can't get a wine like

our Heidsieck under twenty shillin' a bottle anywhere in London;" and,

dropping his voice, he added: "There's only five hundred dozen left. I

drink it every night of my life."

"I'll think of it," old Jolyon would answer; but when he did think of

it there was always the question of fifty guineas entrance fee, and it

would take him four or five years to get in. He continued to think of

it.

He was too old to be a Liberal, had long ceased to believe in the

political doctrines of his Club, had even been known to allude to them

as 'wretched stuff,' and it afforded him pleasure to continue a member

in the teeth of principles so opposed to his own. He had always had

a contempt for the place, having joined it many years ago when they

refused to have him at the 'Hotch Potch' owing to his being 'in trade.'

As if he were not as good as any of them! He naturally despised the

Club that did take him. The members were a poor lot, many of them in the

City--stockbrokers, solicitors, auctioneers--what not! Like most men

of strong character but not too much originality, old Jolyon set small

store by the class to which he belonged. Faithfully he followed their

customs, social and otherwise, and secretly he thought them 'a common

lot.'

Years and philosophy, of which he had his share, had dimmed the

recollection of his defeat at the 'Hotch Potch'; and now in his thoughts

it was enshrined as the Queen of Clubs. He would have been a member all

these years himself, but, owing to the slipshod way his proposer, Jack

Herring, had gone to work, they had not known what they were doing in

keeping him out. Why! they had taken his son Jo at once, and he believed

the boy was still a member; he had received a letter dated from there

eight years ago.

He had not been near the 'Disunion' for months, and the house had

undergone the piebald decoration which people bestow on old houses and

old ships when anxious to sell them.

'Beastly colour, the smoking-room!' he thought. 'The dining-room is

good!'

Its gloomy chocolate, picked out with light green, took his fancy.

He ordered dinner, and sat down in the very corner, at the very table

perhaps! (things did not progress much at the 'Disunion,' a Club of

almost Radical principles) at which he and young Jolyon used to sit

twenty-five years ago, when he was taking the latter to Drury Lane,

during his holidays.

The boy had loved the theatre, and old Jolyon recalled how he used to

sit opposite, concealing his excitement under a careful but transparent

nonchalance.

He ordered himself, too, the very dinner the boy had always chosen-soup,

whitebait, cutlets, and a tart. Ah! if he were only opposite now!

The two had not met for fourteen years. And not for the first time

during those fourteen years old Jolyon wondered whether he had been a

little to blame in the matter of his son. An unfortunate love-affair

with that precious flirt Danae Thornworthy (now Danae Pellew), Anthony

Thornworthy's daughter, had thrown him on the rebound into the arms

of June's mother. He ought perhaps to have put a spoke in the wheel of

their marriage; they were too young; but after that experience of Jo's

susceptibility he had been only too anxious to see him married. And in

four years the crash had come! To have approved his son's conduct

in that crash was, of course, impossible; reason and training--that

combination of potent factors which stood for his principles--told him

of this impossibility, and his heart cried out. The grim remorselessness

of that business had no pity for hearts. There was June, the atom with

flaming hair, who had climbed all over him, twined and twisted herself

about him--about his heart that was made to be the plaything and beloved

resort of tiny, helpless things. With characteristic insight he saw he

must part with one or with the other; no half-measures could serve in

such a situation. In that lay its tragedy. And the tiny, helpless thing

prevailed. He would not run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, and

so to his son he said good-bye.

That good-bye had lasted until now.

He had proposed to continue a reduced allowance to young Jolyon, but

this had been refused, and perhaps that refusal had hurt him more

than anything, for with it had gone the last outlet of his penned-in

affection; and there had come such tangible and solid proof of rupture

as only a transaction in property, a bestowal or refusal of such, could

supply.

His dinner tasted flat. His pint of champagne was dry and bitter stuff,

not like the Veuve Clicquots of old days.

Over his cup of coffee, he bethought him that he would go to the opera.

In the Times, therefore--he had a distrust of other papers--he read the

announcement for the evening. It was 'Fidelio.'

Mercifully not one of those new-fangled German pantomimes by that fellow

Wagner.

Putting on his ancient opera hat, which, with its brim flattened by use,

and huge capacity, looked like an emblem of greater days, and, pulling

out an old pair of very thin lavender kid gloves smelling strongly of

Russia leather, from habitual proximity to the cigar-case in the pocket

of his overcoat, he stepped into a hansom.

The cab rattled gaily along the streets, and old Jolyon was struck by

their unwonted animation.

'The hotels must be doing a tremendous business,' he thought. A

few years ago there had been none of these big hotels. He made a

satisfactory reflection on some property he had in the neighbourhood. It

must be going up in value by leaps and bounds! What traffic!

But from that he began indulging in one of those strange impersonal

speculations, so uncharacteristic of a Forsyte, wherein lay, in part,

the secret of his supremacy amongst them. What atoms men were, and what

a lot of them! And what would become of them all?

He stumbled as he got out of the cab, gave the man his exact fare,

walked up to the ticket office to take his stall, and stood there with

his purse in his hand--he always carried his money in a purse, never

having approved of that habit of carrying it loosely in the pockets, as

so many young men did nowadays. The official leaned out, like an old dog

from a kennel.

"Why," he said in a surprised voice, "it's Mr. Jolyon Forsyte! So it is!

Haven't seen you, sir, for years. Dear me! Times aren't what they were.

Why! you and your brother, and that auctioneer--Mr. Traquair, and Mr.

Nicholas Treffry--you used to have six or seven stalls here regular

every season. And how are you, sir? We don't get younger!"

The colour in old Jolyon's eyes deepened; he paid his guinea. They had

not forgotten him. He marched in, to the sounds of the overture, like an

old war-horse to battle.

Folding his opera hat, he sat down, drew out his lavender gloves in

the old way, and took up his glasses for a long look round the house.

Dropping them at last on his folded hat, he fixed his eyes on the

curtain. More poignantly than ever he felt that it was all over and done

with him. Where were all the women, the pretty women, the house used to

be so full of? Where was that old feeling in the heart as he waited for

one of those great singers? Where that sensation of the intoxication of

life and of his own power to enjoy it all?

The greatest opera-goer of his day! There was no opera now! That fellow

Wagner had ruined everything; no melody left, nor any voices to sing it.

Ah! the wonderful singers! Gone! He sat watching the old scenes acted, a

numb feeling at his heart.

From the curl of silver over his ear to the pose of his foot in its

elastic-sided patent boot, there was nothing clumsy or weak about old

Jolyon. He was as upright--very nearly--as in those old times when he

came every night; his sight was as good--almost as good. But what a

feeling of weariness and disillusion!

He had been in the habit all his life of enjoying things, even imperfect

things--and there had been many imperfect things--he had enjoyed

them all with moderation, so as to keep himself young. But now he was

deserted by his power of enjoyment, by his philosophy, and left with

this dreadful feeling that it was all done with. Not even the Prisoners'

Chorus, nor Florian's Song, had the power to dispel the gloom of his

loneliness.

If Jo were only with him! The boy must be forty by now. He had wasted

fourteen years out of the life of his only son. And Jo was no longer

a social pariah. He was married. Old Jolyon had been unable to refrain

from marking his appreciation of the action by enclosing his son a

cheque for L500. The cheque had been returned in a letter from the

'Hotch Potch,' couched in these words.

'MY DEAREST FATHER,

'Your generous gift was welcome as a sign that you might think worse of

me. I return it, but should you think fit to invest it for the benefit

of the little chap (we call him Jolly), who bears our Christian and, by

courtesy, our surname, I shall be very glad.

'I hope with all my heart that your health is as good as ever.

'Your loving son,

'Jo.'

The letter was like the boy. He had always been an amiable chap. Old

Jolyon had sent this reply:

'MY DEAR JO,

'The sum (L500) stands in my books for the benefit of your boy, under

the name of Jolyon Forsyte, and will be duly-credited with interest at

5 per cent. I hope that you are doing well. My health remains good at

present.

'With love, I am,

'Your affectionate Father,

'JOLYON FORSYTE.'

And every year on the 1st of January he had added a hundred and the

interest. The sum was mounting up--next New Year's Day it would be

fifteen hundred and odd pounds! And it is difficult to say how much

satisfaction he had got out of that yearly transaction. But the

correspondence had ended.

In spite of his love for his son, in spite of an instinct, partly

constitutional, partly the result, as in thousands of his class, of

the continual handling and watching of affairs, prompting him to judge

conduct by results rather than by principle, there was at the bottom of

his heart a sort of uneasiness. His son ought, under the circumstances,

to have gone to the dogs; that law was laid down in all the novels,

sermons, and plays he had ever read, heard, or witnessed.

After receiving the cheque back there seemed to him to be something

wrong somewhere. Why had his son not gone to the dogs? But, then, who

could tell?

He had heard, of course--in fact, he had made it his business to find

out--that Jo lived in St. John's Wood, that he had a little house in

Wistaria Avenue with a garden, and took his wife about with him into

society--a queer sort of society, no doubt--and that they had

two children--the little chap they called Jolly (considering the

circumstances the name struck him as cynical, and old Jolyon both

feared and disliked cynicism), and a girl called Holly, born since the

marriage. Who could tell what his son's circumstances really were? He

had capitalized the income he had inherited from his mother's father

and joined Lloyd's as an underwriter; he painted pictures,

too--water-colours. Old Jolyon knew this, for he had surreptitiously

bought them from time to time, after chancing to see his son's name

signed at the bottom of a representation of the river Thames in a

dealer's window. He thought them bad, and did not hang them because of

the signature; he kept them locked up in a drawer.

In the great opera-house a terrible yearning came on him to see his son.

He remembered the days when he had been wont to slide him, in a brown

holland suit, to and fro under the arch of his legs; the times when he

ran beside the boy's pony, teaching him to ride; the day he first took

him to school. He had been a loving, lovable little chap! After he went

to Eton he had acquired, perhaps, a little too much of that desirable

manner which old Jolyon knew was only to be obtained at such places

and at great expense; but he had always been companionable. Always a

companion, even after Cambridge--a little far off, perhaps, owing to

the advantages he had received. Old Jolyon's feeling towards our public

schools and 'Varsities never wavered, and he retained touchingly his

attitude of admiration and mistrust towards a system appropriate to

the highest in the land, of which he had not himself been privileged to

partake.... Now that June had gone and left, or as good as left him, it

would have been a comfort to see his son again. Guilty of this treason

to his family, his principles, his class, old Jolyon fixed his eyes

on the singer. A poor thing--a wretched poor thing! And the Florian a

perfect stick!

It was over. They were easily pleased nowadays!

In the crowded street he snapped up a cab under the very nose of a stout

and much younger gentleman, who had already assumed it to be his own.

His route lay through Pall Mall, and at the corner, instead of going

through the Green Park, the cabman turned to drive up St. James's

Street. Old Jolyon put his hand through the trap (he could not bear

being taken out of his way); in turning, however, he found himself

opposite the 'Hotch Potch,' and the yearning that had been secretly with

him the whole evening prevailed. He called to the driver to stop. He

would go in and ask if Jo still belonged there.

He went in. The hall looked exactly as it did when he used to dine there

with Jack Herring, and they had the best cook in London; and he looked

round with the shrewd, straight glance that had caused him all his life

to be better served than most men.

"Mr. Jolyon Forsyte still a member here?"

"Yes, sir; in the Club now, sir. What name?"

Old Jolyon was taken aback.

"His father," he said.

And having spoken, he took his stand, back to the fireplace.

Young Jolyon, on the point of leaving the Club, had put on his hat, and

was in the act of crossing the hall, as the porter met him. He was no

longer young, with hair going grey, and face--a narrower replica of his

father's, with the same large drooping moustache--decidedly worn.

He turned pale. This meeting was terrible after all those years, for

nothing in the world was so terrible as a scene. They met and crossed

hands without a word. Then, with a quaver in his voice, the father said:

"How are you, my boy?"

The son answered:

"How are you, Dad?"

Old Jolyon's hand trembled in its thin lavender glove.

"If you're going my way," he said, "I can give you a lift."

And as though in the habit of taking each other home every night they

went out and stepped into the cab.

To old Jolyon it seemed that his son had grown. 'More of a man

altogether,' was his comment. Over the natural amiability of that son's

face had come a rather sardonic mask, as though he had found in the

circumstances of his life the necessity for armour. The features

were certainly those of a Forsyte, but the expression was more the

introspective look of a student or philosopher. He had no doubt been

obliged to look into himself a good deal in the course of those fifteen

years.

To young Jolyon the first sight of his father was undoubtedly a

shock--he looked so worn and old. But in the cab he seemed hardly to

have changed, still having the calm look so well remembered, still being

upright and keen-eyed.

"You look well, Dad."

"Middling," old Jolyon answered.

He was the prey of an anxiety that he found he must put into words.

Having got his son back like this, he felt he must know what was his

financial position.

"Jo," he said, "I should like to hear what sort of water you're in. I

suppose you're in debt?"

He put it this way that his son might find it easier to confess.

Young Jolyon answered in his ironical voice:

"No! I'm not in debt!"

Old Jolyon saw that he was angry, and touched his hand. He had run a

risk. It was worth it, however, and Jo had never been sulky with him.

They drove on, without speaking again, to Stanhope Gate. Old Jolyon

invited him in, but young Jolyon shook his head.

"June's not here," said his father hastily: "went of to-day on a visit.

I suppose you know that she's engaged to be married?"

"Already?" murmured young Jolyon'.

Old Jolyon stepped out, and, in paying the cab fare, for the first time

in his life gave the driver a sovereign in mistake for a shilling.

Placing the coin in his mouth, the cabman whipped his horse secretly on

the underneath and hurried away.

Old Jolyon turned the key softly in the lock, pushed open the door,

and beckoned. His son saw him gravely hanging up his coat, with an

expression on his face like that of a boy who intends to steal cherries.

The door of the dining-room was open, the gas turned low; a spirit-urn

hissed on a tea-tray, and close to it a cynical looking cat had fallen

asleep on the dining-table. Old Jolyon 'shoo'd' her off at once. The

incident was a relief to his feelings; he rattled his opera hat behind

the animal.

"She's got fleas," he said, following her out of the room. Through the

door in the hall leading to the basement he called "Hssst!" several

times, as though assisting the cat's departure, till by some strange

coincidence the butler appeared below.

"You can go to bed, Parfitt," said old Jolyon. "I will lock up and put

out."

When he again entered the dining-room the cat unfortunately preceded

him, with her tail in the air, proclaiming that she had seen through

this manouevre for suppressing the butler from the first....

A fatality had dogged old Jolyon's domestic stratagems all his life.

Young Jolyon could not help smiling. He was very well versed in irony,

and everything that evening seemed to him ironical. The episode of the

cat; the announcement of his own daughter's engagement. So he had no

more part or parcel in her than he had in the Puss! And the poetical

justice of this appealed to him.

"What is June like now?" he asked.

"She's a little thing," returned old Jolyon; "they say she's like me,

but that's their folly. She's more like your mother--the same eyes and

hair."

"Ah! and she is pretty?"

Old Jolyon was too much of a Forsyte to praise anything freely;

especially anything for which he had a genuine admiration.

"Not bad looking--a regular Forsyte chin. It'll be lonely here when

she's gone, Jo."

The look on his face again gave young Jolyon the shock he had felt on

first seeing his father.

"What will you do with yourself, Dad? I suppose she's wrapped up in

him?"

"Do with myself?" repeated old Jolyon with an angry break in his voice.

"It'll be miserable work living here alone. I don't know how it's

to end. I wish to goodness...." He checked himself, and added: "The

question is, what had I better do with this house?"

Young Jolyon looked round the room. It was peculiarly vast and dreary,

decorated with the enormous pictures of still life that he remembered

as a boy--sleeping dogs with their noses resting on bunches of carrots,

together with onions and grapes lying side by side in mild surprise.

The house was a white elephant, but he could not conceive of his father

living in a smaller place; and all the more did it all seem ironical.

In his great chair with the book-rest sat old Jolyon, the figurehead

of his family and class and creed, with his white head and dome-like

forehead, the representative of moderation, and order, and love of

property. As lonely an old man as there was in London.

There he sat in the gloomy comfort of the room, a puppet in the power of

great forces that cared nothing for family or class or creed, but moved,

machine-like, with dread processes to inscrutable ends. This was how it

struck young Jolyon, who had the impersonal eye.

The poor old Dad! So this was the end, the purpose to which he had

lived with such magnificent moderation! To be lonely, and grow older and

older, yearning for a soul to speak to!

In his turn old Jolyon looked back at his son. He wanted to talk about

many things that he had been unable to talk about all these years. It

had been impossible to seriously confide in June his conviction that

property in the Soho quarter would go up in value; his uneasiness

about that tremendous silence of Pippin, the superintendent of the New

Colliery Company, of which he had so long been chairman; his disgust at

the steady fall in American Golgothas, or even to discuss how, by some

sort of settlement, he could best avoid the payment of those death

duties which would follow his decease. Under the influence, however, of

a cup of tea, which he seemed to stir indefinitely, he began to speak at

last. A new vista of life was thus opened up, a promised land of talk,

where he could find a harbour against the waves of anticipation and

regret; where he could soothe his soul with the opium of devising how to

round off his property and make eternal the only part of him that was to

remain alive.

Young Jolyon was a good listener; it was his great quality. He kept his

eyes fixed on his father's face, putting a question now and then.

The clock struck one before old Jolyon had finished, and at the sound of

its striking his principles came back. He took out his watch with a look

of surprise:

"I must go to bed, Jo," he said.

Young Jolyon rose and held out his hand to help his father up. The old

face looked worn and hollow again; the eyes were steadily averted.

"Good-bye, my boy; take care of yourself."

A moment passed, and young Jolyon, turning on his, heel, marched out

at the door. He could hardly see; his smile quavered. Never in all

the fifteen years since he had first found out that life was no simple

business, had he found it so singularly complicated.

CHAPTER III--DINNER AT SWITHIN'S

In Swithin's orange and light-blue dining-room, facing the Park, the

round table was laid for twelve.

A cut-glass chandelier filled with lighted candles hung like a giant

stalactite above its centre, radiating over large gilt-framed mirrors,

slabs of marble on the tops of side-tables, and heavy gold chairs with

crewel worked seats. Everything betokened that love of beauty so deeply

implanted in each family which has had its own way to make into Society,

out of the more vulgar heart of Nature. Swithin had indeed an impatience

of simplicity, a love of ormolu, which had always stamped him amongst

his associates as a man of great, if somewhat luxurious taste; and out

of the knowledge that no one could possibly enter his rooms without

perceiving him to be a man of wealth, he had derived a solid and

prolonged happiness such as perhaps no other circumstance in life had

afforded him.

Since his retirement from land agency, a profession deplorable in

his estimation, especially as to its auctioneering department, he had

abandoned himself to naturally aristocratic tastes.

The perfect luxury of his latter days had embedded him like a fly in

sugar; and his mind, where very little took place from morning till

night, was the junction of two curiously opposite emotions, a lingering

and sturdy satisfaction that he had made his own way and his own

fortune, and a sense that a man of his distinction should never have

been allowed to soil his mind with work.

He stood at the sideboard in a white waistcoat with large gold and onyx

buttons, watching his valet screw the necks of three champagne bottles

deeper into ice-pails. Between the points of his stand-up collar,

which--though it hurt him to move--he would on no account have had

altered, the pale flesh of his under chin remained immovable. His eyes

roved from bottle to bottle. He was debating, and he argued like this:

Jolyon drinks a glass, perhaps two, he's so careful of himself. James,

he can't take his wine nowadays. Nicholas--Fanny and he would

swill water he shouldn't wonder! Soames didn't count; these young

nephews--Soames was thirty-one--couldn't drink! But Bosinney?

Encountering in the name of this stranger something outside the range

of his philosophy, Swithin paused. A misgiving arose within him! It

was impossible to tell! June was only a girl, in love too! Emily (Mrs.

James) liked a good glass of champagne. It was too dry for Juley, poor

old soul, she had no palate. As to Hatty Chessman! The thought of this

old friend caused a cloud of thought to obscure the perfect glassiness

of his eyes: He shouldn't wonder if she drank half a bottle!

But in thinking of his remaining guest, an expression like that of a

cat who is just going to purr stole over his old face: Mrs. Soames! She

mightn't take much, but she would appreciate what she drank; it was a

pleasure to give her good wine! A pretty woman--and sympathetic to him!

The thought of her was like champagne itself! A pleasure to give a good

wine to a young woman who looked so well, who knew how to dress, with

charming manners, quite distinguished--a pleasure to entertain her.

Between the points of his collar he gave his head the first small,

painful oscillation of the evening.

"Adolf!" he said. "Put in another bottle."

He himself might drink a good deal, for, thanks to that prescription of

Blight's, he found himself extremely well, and he had been careful to

take no lunch. He had not felt so well for weeks. Puffing out his lower

lip, he gave his last instructions:

"Adolf, the least touch of the West India when you come to the ham."

Passing into the anteroom, he sat down on the edge of a chair, with

his knees apart; and his tall, bulky form was wrapped at once in an

expectant, strange, primeval immobility. He was ready to rise at a

moment's notice. He had not given a dinner-party for months. This

dinner in honour of June's engagement had seemed a bore at first (among

Forsytes the custom of solemnizing engagements by feasts was religiously

observed), but the labours of sending invitations and ordering the

repast over, he felt pleasantly stimulated.

And thus sitting, a watch in his hand, fat, and smooth, and golden, like

a flattened globe of butter, he thought of nothing.

A long man, with side whiskers, who had once been in Swithin's service,

but was now a greengrocer, entered and proclaimed:

"Mrs. Chessman, Mrs. Septimus Small!"

Two ladies advanced. The one in front, habited entirely in red, had

large, settled patches of the same colour in her cheeks, and a hard,

dashing eye. She walked at Swithin, holding out a hand cased in a long,

primrose-coloured glove:

"Well! Swithin," she said, "I haven't seen you for ages. How are you?

Why, my dear boy, how stout you're getting!"

The fixity of Swithin's eye alone betrayed emotion. A dumb and grumbling

anger swelled his bosom. It was vulgar to be stout, to talk of being

stout; he had a chest, nothing more. Turning to his sister, he grasped

her hand, and said in a tone of command:

"Well, Juley."

Mrs. Septimus Small was the tallest of the four sisters; her good, round

old face had gone a little sour; an innumerable pout clung all over

it, as if it had been encased in an iron wire mask up to that evening,

which, being suddenly removed, left little rolls of mutinous flesh all

over her countenance. Even her eyes were pouting. It was thus that she

recorded her permanent resentment at the loss of Septimus Small.

She had quite a reputation for saying the wrong thing, and, tenacious

like all her breed, she would hold to it when she had said it, and add

to it another wrong thing, and so on. With the decease of her husband

the family tenacity, the family matter-of-factness, had gone sterile

within her. A great talker, when allowed, she would converse without the

faintest animation for hours together, relating, with epic monotony, the

innumerable occasions on which Fortune had misused her; nor did she ever

perceive that her hearers sympathized with Fortune, for her heart was

kind.

Having sat, poor soul, long by the bedside of Small (a man of poor

constitution), she had acquired, the habit, and there were countless

subsequent occasions when she had sat immense periods of time to amuse

sick people, children, and other helpless persons, and she could never

divest herself of the feeling that the world was the most ungrateful

place anybody could live in. Sunday after Sunday she sat at the feet of

that extremely witty preacher, the Rev. Thomas Scoles, who exercised a

great influence over her; but she succeeded in convincing everybody that

even this was a misfortune. She had passed into a proverb in the family,

and when anybody was observed to be peculiarly distressing, he was known

as a regular 'Juley.' The habit of her mind would have killed anybody

but a Forsyte at forty; but she was seventy-two, and had never looked

better. And one felt that there were capacities for enjoyment about her

which might yet come out. She owned three canaries, the cat Tommy,

and half a parrot--in common with her sister Hester;--and these poor

creatures (kept carefully out of Timothy's way--he was nervous about

animals), unlike human beings, recognising that she could not help being

blighted, attached themselves to her passionately.

She was sombrely magnificent this evening in black bombazine, with

a mauve front cut in a shy triangle, and crowned with a black velvet

ribbon round the base of her thin throat; black and mauve for evening

wear was esteemed very chaste by nearly every Forsyte.

Pouting at Swithin, she said:

"Ann has been asking for you. You haven't been near us for an age!"

Swithin put his thumbs within the armholes of his waistcoat, and

replied:

"Ann's getting very shaky; she ought to have a doctor!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Forsyte!"

Nicholas Forsyte, cocking his rectangular eyebrows, wore a smile. He

had succeeded during the day in bringing to fruition a scheme for the

employment of a tribe from Upper India in the gold-mines of Ceylon. A

pet plan, carried at last in the teeth of great difficulties--he was

justly pleased. It would double the output of his mines, and, as he had

often forcibly argued, all experience tended to show that a man must

die; and whether he died of a miserable old age in his own country,

or prematurely of damp in the bottom of a foreign mine, was surely of

little consequence, provided that by a change in his mode of life he

benefited the British Empire.

His ability was undoubted. Raising his broken nose towards his listener,

he would add:

"For want of a few hundred of these fellows we haven't paid a dividend

for years, and look at the price of the shares. I can't get ten

shillings for them."

He had been at Yarmouth, too, and had come back feeling that he had

added at least ten years to his own life. He grasped Swithin's hand,

exclaiming in a jocular voice:

"Well, so here we are again!"

Mrs. Nicholas, an effete woman, smiled a smile of frightened jollity

behind his back.

"Mr. and Mrs. James Forsyte! Mr. and Mrs. Soames Forsyte!"

Swithin drew his heels together, his deportment ever admirable.

"Well, James, well Emily! How are you, Soames? How do you do?"

His hand enclosed Irene's, and his eyes swelled. She was a pretty

woman--a little too pale, but her figure, her eyes, her teeth! Too good

for that chap Soames!

The gods had given Irene dark brown eyes and golden hair, that strange

combination, provocative of men's glances, which is said to be the

mark of a weak character. And the full, soft pallor of her neck and

shoulders, above a gold-coloured frock, gave to her personality an

alluring strangeness.

Soames stood behind, his eyes fastened on his wife's neck. The hands of

Swithin's watch, which he still held open in his hand, had left eight

behind; it was half an hour beyond his dinner-time--he had had no

lunch--and a strange primeval impatience surged up within him.

"It's not like Jolyon to be late!" he said to Irene, with uncontrollable

vexation. "I suppose it'll be June keeping him!"

"People in love are always late," she answered.

Swithin stared at her; a dusky orange dyed his cheeks.

"They've no business to be. Some fashionable nonsense!"

And behind this outburst the inarticulate violence of primitive

generations seemed to mutter and grumble.

"Tell me what you think of my new star, Uncle Swithin," said Irene

softly.

Among the lace in the bosom of her dress was shining a five-pointed

star, made of eleven diamonds. Swithin looked at the star. He had a

pretty taste in stones; no question could have been more sympathetically

devised to distract his attention.

"Who gave you that?" he asked.

"Soames."

There was no change in her face, but Swithin's pale eyes bulged as

though he might suddenly have been afflicted with insight.

"I dare say you're dull at home," he said. "Any day you like to come and

dine with me, I'll give you as good a bottle of wine as you'll get in

London."

"Miss June Forsyte--Mr. Jolyon Forsyte!... Mr. Boswainey!..."

Swithin moved his arm, and said in a rumbling voice:

"Dinner, now--dinner!"

He took in Irene, on the ground that he had not entertained her since

she was a bride. June was the portion of Bosinney, who was placed

between Irene and his fiancee. On the other side of June was James with

Mrs. Nicholas, then old Jolyon with Mrs. James, Nicholas with Hatty

Chessman, Soames with Mrs. Small, completing, the circle to Swithin

again.

Family dinners of the Forsytes observe certain traditions. There are,

for instance, no hors d'oeuvre. The reason for this is unknown. Theory

among the younger members traces it to the disgraceful price of oysters;

it is more probably due to a desire to come to the point, to a good

practical sense deciding at once that hors d'oeuvre are but poor things.

The Jameses alone, unable to withstand a custom almost universal in Park

Lane, are now and then unfaithful.

A silent, almost morose, inattention to each other succeeds to the

subsidence into their seats, lasting till well into the first entree,

but interspersed with remarks such as, "Tom's bad again; I can't tell

what's the matter with him!" "I suppose Ann doesn't come down in the

mornings?"--"What's the name of your doctor, Fanny?" "Stubbs?" "He's a

quack!"--"Winifred? She's got too many children. Four, isn't it? She's

as thin as a lath!"--"What d'you give for this sherry, Swithin? Too dry

for me!"

With the second glass of champagne, a kind of hum makes itself heard,

which, when divested of casual accessories and resolved into its primal

element, is found to be James telling a story, and this goes on for

a long time, encroaching sometimes even upon what must universally be

recognised as the crowning point of a Forsyte feast--'the saddle of

mutton.'

No Forsyte has given a dinner without providing a saddle of mutton.

There is something in its succulent solidity which makes it suitable to

people 'of a certain position.' It is nourishing and tasty; the sort of

thing a man remembers eating. It has a past and a future, like a deposit

paid into a bank; and it is something that can be argued about.

Each branch of the family tenaciously held to a particular locality--old

Jolyon swearing by Dartmoor, James by Welsh, Swithin by Southdown,

Nicholas maintaining that people might sneer, but there was nothing like

New Zealand! As for Roger, the 'original' of the brothers, he had been

obliged to invent a locality of his own, and with an ingenuity worthy of

a man who had devised a new profession for his sons, he had discovered

a shop where they sold German; on being remonstrated with, he had proved

his point by producing a butcher's bill, which showed that he paid more

than any of the others. It was on this occasion that old Jolyon, turning

to June, had said in one of his bursts of philosophy:

"You may depend upon it, they're a cranky lot, the Forsytes--and you'll

find it out, as you grow older!"

Timothy alone held apart, for though he ate saddle of mutton heartily,

he was, he said, afraid of it.

To anyone interested psychologically in Forsytes, this great

saddle-of-mutton trait is of prime importance; not only does it

illustrate their tenacity, both collectively and as individuals, but it

marks them as belonging in fibre and instincts to that great class

which believes in nourishment and flavour, and yields to no sentimental

craving for beauty.

Younger members of the family indeed would have done without a joint

altogether, preferring guinea-fowl, or lobster salad--something which

appealed to the imagination, and had less nourishment--but these were

females; or, if not, had been corrupted by their wives, or by mothers,

who having been forced to eat saddle of mutton throughout their married

lives, had passed a secret hostility towards it into the fibre of their

sons.

The great saddle-of-mutton controversy at an end, a Tewkesbury ham

commenced, together with the least touch of West Indian--Swithin was

so long over this course that he caused a block in the progress of the

dinner. To devote himself to it with better heart, he paused in his

conversation.

From his seat by Mrs. Septimus Small Soames was watching. He had a

reason of his own connected with a pet building scheme, for observing

Bosinney. The architect might do for his purpose; he looked clever, as

he sat leaning back in his chair, moodily making little ramparts with

bread-crumbs. Soames noted his dress clothes to be well cut, but too

small, as though made many years ago.

He saw him turn to Irene and say something and her face sparkle as he

often saw it sparkle at other people--never at himself. He tried to

catch what they were saying, but Aunt Juley was speaking.

Hadn't that always seemed very extraordinary to Soames? Only last Sunday

dear Mr. Scole, had been so witty in his sermon, so sarcastic, "For

what," he had said, "shall it profit a man if he gain his own soul,

but lose all his property?" That, he had said, was the motto of the

middle-class; now, what had he meant by that? Of course, it might be

what middle-class people believed--she didn't know; what did Soames

think?

He answered abstractedly: "How should I know? Scoles is a humbug,

though, isn't he?" For Bosinney was looking round the table, as if

pointing out the peculiarities of the guests, and Soames wondered

what he was saying. By her smile Irene was evidently agreeing with his

remarks. She seemed always to agree with other people.

Her eyes were turned on himself; Soames dropped his glance at once. The

smile had died off her lips.

A humbug? But what did Soames mean? If Mr. Scoles was a humbug, a

clergyman--then anybody might be--it was frightful!

"Well, and so they are!" said Soames.

During Aunt Juley's momentary and horrified silence he caught some words

of Irene's that sounded like: 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!'

But Swithin had finished his ham.

"Where do you go for your mushrooms?" he was saying to Irene in a voice

like a courtier's; "you ought to go to Smileybob's--he'll give 'em you

fresh. These little men, they won't take the trouble!"

Irene turned to answer him, and Soames saw Bosinney watching her and

smiling to himself. A curious smile the fellow had. A half-simple

arrangement, like a child who smiles when he is pleased. As for George's

nickname--'The Buccaneer'--he did not think much of that. And, seeing

Bosinney turn to June, Soames smiled too, but sardonically--he did not

like June, who was not looking too pleased.

This was not surprising, for she had just held the following

conversation with James:

"I stayed on the river on my way home, Uncle James, and saw a beautiful

site for a house."

James, a slow and thorough eater, stopped the process of mastication.

"Eh?" he said. "Now, where was that?"

"Close to Pangbourne."

James placed a piece of ham in his mouth, and June waited.

"I suppose you wouldn't know whether the land about there was freehold?"

he asked at last. "You wouldn't know anything about the price of land

about there?"

"Yes," said June; "I made inquiries." Her little resolute face under its

copper crown was suspiciously eager and aglow.

James regarded her with the air of an inquisitor.

"What? You're not thinking of buying land!" he ejaculated, dropping his

fork.

June was greatly encouraged by his interest. It had long been her pet

plan that her uncles should benefit themselves and Bosinney by building

country-houses.

"Of course not," she said. "I thought it would be such a splendid place

for--you or--someone to build a country-house!"

James looked at her sideways, and placed a second piece of ham in his

mouth....

"Land ought to be very dear about there," he said.

What June had taken for personal interest was only the impersonal

excitement of every Forsyte who hears of something eligible in danger

of passing into other hands. But she refused to see the disappearance of

her chance, and continued to press her point.

"You ought to go into the country, Uncle James. I wish I had a lot of

money, I wouldn't live another day in London."

James was stirred to the depths of his long thin figure; he had no idea

his niece held such downright views.

"Why don't you go into the country?" repeated June; "it would do you a

lot of good."

"Why?" began James in a fluster. "Buying land--what good d'you suppose I

can do buying land, building houses?--I couldn't get four per cent. for

my money!"

"What does that matter? You'd get fresh air."

"Fresh air!" exclaimed James; "what should I do with fresh air,"

"I should have thought anybody liked to have fresh air," said June

scornfully.

James wiped his napkin all over his mouth.

"You don't know the value of money," he said, avoiding her eye.

"No! and I hope I never shall!" and, biting her lip with inexpressible

mortification, poor June was silent.

Why were her own relations so rich, and Phil never knew where the money

was coming from for to-morrow's tobacco. Why couldn't they do

something for him? But they were so selfish. Why couldn't they build

country-houses? She had all that naive dogmatism which is so pathetic,

and sometimes achieves such great results. Bosinney, to whom she turned

in her discomfiture, was talking to Irene, and a chill fell on June's

spirit. Her eyes grew steady with anger, like old Jolyon's when his will

was crossed.

James, too, was much disturbed. He felt as though someone had threatened

his right to invest his money at five per cent. Jolyon had spoiled her.

None of his girls would have said such a thing. James had always been

exceedingly liberal to his children, and the consciousness of this

made him feel it all the more deeply. He trifled moodily with his

strawberries, then, deluging them with cream, he ate them quickly; they,

at all events, should not escape him.

No wonder he was upset. Engaged for fifty-four years (he had been

admitted a solicitor on the earliest day sanctioned by the law) in

arranging mortgages, preserving investments at a dead level of high and

safe interest, conducting negotiations on the principle of securing

the utmost possible out of other people compatible with safety to

his clients and himself, in calculations as to the exact pecuniary

possibilities of all the relations of life, he had come at last to

think purely in terms of money. Money was now his light, his medium

for seeing, that without which he was really unable to see, really not

cognisant of phenomena; and to have this thing, "I hope I shall never

know the value of money!" said to his face, saddened and exasperated

him. He knew it to be nonsense, or it would have frightened him. What

was the world coming to! Suddenly recollecting the story of young

Jolyon, however, he felt a little comforted, for what could you expect

with a father like that! This turned his thoughts into a channel still

less pleasant. What was all this talk about Soames and Irene?

As in all self-respecting families, an emporium had been established

where family secrets were bartered, and family stock priced. It was

known on Forsyte 'Change that Irene regretted her marriage. Her regret

was disapproved of. She ought to have known her own mind; no dependable

woman made these mistakes.

James reflected sourly that they had a nice house (rather small) in

an excellent position, no children, and no money troubles. Soames was

reserved about his affairs, but he must be getting a very warm man. He

had a capital income from the business--for Soames, like his father,

was a member of that well-known firm of solicitors, Forsyte, Bustard and

Forsyte--and had always been very careful. He had done quite unusually

well with some mortgages he had taken up, too--a little timely

foreclosure--most lucky hits!

There was no reason why Irene should not be happy, yet they said she'd

been asking for a separate room. He knew where that ended. It wasn't as

if Soames drank.

James looked at his daughter-in-law. That unseen glance of his was

cold and dubious. Appeal and fear were in it, and a sense of personal

grievance. Why should he be worried like this? It was very likely all

nonsense; women were funny things! They exaggerated so, you didn't know

what to believe; and then, nobody told him anything, he had to find out

everything for himself. Again he looked furtively at Irene, and across

from her to Soames. The latter, listening to Aunt Juley, was looking up,

under his brows in the direction of Bosinney.

'He's fond of her, I know,' thought James. 'Look at the way he's always

giving her things.'

And the extraordinary unreasonableness of her disaffection struck him

with increased force.

It was a pity, too, she was a taking little thing, and he, James, would

be really quite fond of her if she'd only let him. She had taken up

lately with June; that was doing her no good, that was certainly doing

her no good. She was getting to have opinions of her own. He didn't

know what she wanted with anything of the sort. She'd a good home, and

everything she could wish for. He felt that her friends ought to be

chosen for her. To go on like this was dangerous.

June, indeed, with her habit of championing the unfortunate, had dragged

from Irene a confession, and, in return, had preached the necessity of

facing the evil, by separation, if need be. But in the face of these

exhortations, Irene had kept a brooding silence, as though she found

terrible the thought of this struggle carried through in cold blood. He

would never give her up, she had said to June.

"Who cares?" June cried; "let him do what he likes--you've only to

stick to it!" And she had not scrupled to say something of this sort at

Timothy's; James, when he heard of it, had felt a natural indignation

and horror.

What if Irene were to take it into her head to--he could hardly frame

the thought--to leave Soames? But he felt this thought so unbearable

that he at once put it away; the shady visions it conjured up, the sound

of family tongues buzzing in his ears, the horror of the conspicuous

happening so close to him, to one of his own children! Luckily, she had

no money--a beggarly fifty pound a year! And he thought of the deceased

Heron, who had had nothing to leave her, with contempt. Brooding over

his glass, his long legs twisted under the table, he quite omitted

to rise when the ladies left the room. He would have to speak to

Soames--would have to put him on his guard; they could not go on like

this, now that such a contingency had occurred to him. And he noticed

with sour disfavour that June had left her wine-glasses full of wine.

'That little, thing's at the bottom of it all,' he mused; 'Irene'd never

have thought of it herself.' James was a man of imagination.

The voice of Swithin roused him from his reverie.

"I gave four hundred pounds for it," he was saying. "Of course it's a

regular work of art."

"Four hundred! H'm! that's a lot of money!" chimed in Nicholas.

The object alluded to was an elaborate group of statuary in Italian

marble, which, placed upon a lofty stand (also of marble), diffused an

atmosphere of culture throughout the room. The subsidiary figures, of

which there were six, female, nude, and of highly ornate workmanship,

were all pointing towards the central figure, also nude, and female, who

was pointing at herself; and all this gave the observer a very pleasant

sense of her extreme value. Aunt Juley, nearly opposite, had had the

greatest difficulty in not looking at it all the evening.

Old Jolyon spoke; it was he who had started the discussion.

"Four hundred fiddlesticks! Don't tell me you gave four hundred for

that?"

Between the points of his collar Swithin's chin made the second painful

oscillatory movement of the evening.

"Four-hundred-pounds, of English money; not a farthing less. I don't

regret it. It's not common English--it's genuine modern Italian!"

Soames raised the corner of his lip in a smile, and looked across at

Bosinney. The architect was grinning behind the fumes of his cigarette.

Now, indeed, he looked more like a buccaneer.

"There's a lot of work about it," remarked James hastily, who was really

moved by the size of the group. "It'd sell well at Jobson's."

"The poor foreign dey-vil that made it," went on Swithin, "asked me five

hundred--I gave him four. It's worth eight. Looked half-starved, poor

dey-vil!"

"Ah!" chimed in Nicholas suddenly, "poor, seedy-lookin' chaps,

these artists; it's a wonder to me how they live. Now, there's young

Flageoletti, that Fanny and the girls are always hav'in' in, to play the

fiddle; if he makes a hundred a year it's as much as ever he does!"

James shook his head. "Ah!" he said, "I don't know how they live!"

Old Jolyon had risen, and, cigar in mouth, went to inspect the group at

close quarters.

"Wouldn't have given two for it!" he pronounced at last.

Soames saw his father and Nicholas glance at each other anxiously; and,

on the other side of Swithin, Bosinney, still shrouded in smoke.

'I wonder what he thinks of it?' thought Soames, who knew well enough

that this group was hopelessly vieux jeu; hopelessly of the last

generation. There was no longer any sale at Jobson's for such works of

art.

Swithin's answer came at last. "You never knew anything about a statue.

You've got your pictures, and that's all!"

Old Jolyon walked back to his seat, puffing his cigar. It was not likely

that he was going to be drawn into an argument with an obstinate beggar

like Swithin, pig-headed as a mule, who had never known a statue from

a---straw hat.

"Stucco!" was all he said.

It had long been physically impossible for Swithin to start; his fist

came down on the table.

"Stucco! I should like to see anything you've got in your house half as

good!"

And behind his speech seemed to sound again that rumbling violence of

primitive generations.

It was James who saved the situation.

"Now, what do you say, Mr. Bosinney? You're an architect; you ought to

know all about statues and things!"

Every eye was turned upon Bosinney; all waited with a strange,

suspicious look for his answer.

And Soames, speaking for the first time, asked:

"Yes, Bosinney, what do you say?"

Bosinney replied coolly:

"The work is a remarkable one."

His words were addressed to Swithin, his eyes smiled slyly at old

Jolyon; only Soames remained unsatisfied.

"Remarkable for what?"

"For its naivete"

The answer was followed by an impressive silence; Swithin alone was not

sure whether a compliment was intended.

CHAPTER IV--PROJECTION OF THE HOUSE

Soames Forsyte walked out of his green-painted front door three days

after the dinner at Swithin's, and looking back from across the Square,

confirmed his impression that the house wanted painting.

He had left his wife sitting on the sofa in the drawing-room, her hands

crossed in her lap, manifestly waiting for him to go out. This was not

unusual. It happened, in fact, every day.

He could not understand what she found wrong with him. It was not as

if he drank! Did he run into debt, or gamble, or swear; was he violent;

were his friends rackety; did he stay out at night? On the contrary.

The profound, subdued aversion which he felt in his wife was a mystery

to him, and a source of the most terrible irritation. That she had made

a mistake, and did not love him, had tried to love him and could not

love him, was obviously no reason.

He that could imagine so outlandish a cause for his wife's not getting

on with him was certainly no Forsyte.

Soames was forced, therefore, to set the blame entirely down to his

wife. He had never met a woman so capable of inspiring affection. They

could not go anywhere without his seeing how all the men were attracted

by her; their looks, manners, voices, betrayed it; her behaviour under

this attention had been beyond reproach. That she was one of those

women--not too common in the Anglo-Saxon race--born to be loved and

to love, who when not loving are not living, had certainly never even

occurred to him. Her power of attraction, he regarded as part of her

value as his property; but it made him, indeed, suspect that she could

give as well as receive; and she gave him nothing! 'Then why did she

marry me?' was his continual thought. He had forgotten his courtship;

that year and a half when he had besieged and lain in wait for her,

devising schemes for her entertainment, giving her presents, proposing

to her periodically, and keeping her other admirers away with his

perpetual presence. He had forgotten the day when, adroitly taking

advantage of an acute phase of her dislike to her home surroundings, he

crowned his labours with success. If he remembered anything, it was the

dainty capriciousness with which the gold-haired, dark-eyed girl

had treated him. He certainly did not remember the look on her

face--strange, passive, appealing--when suddenly one day she had

yielded, and said that she would marry him.

It had been one of those real devoted wooings which books and people

praise, when the lover is at length rewarded for hammering the iron till

it is malleable, and all must be happy ever after as the wedding bells.

Soames walked eastwards, mousing doggedly along on the shady side.

The house wanted doing, up, unless he decided to move into the country,

and build.

For the hundredth time that month he turned over this problem. There

was no use in rushing into things! He was very comfortably off, with an

increasing income getting on for three thousand a year; but his invested

capital was not perhaps so large as his father believed--James had a

tendency to expect that his children should be better off than they

were. 'I can manage eight thousand easily enough,' he thought, 'without

calling in either Robertson's or Nicholl's.'

He had stopped to look in at a picture shop, for Soames was an 'amateur'

of pictures, and had a little-room in No. 62, Montpellier Square, full

of canvases, stacked against the wall, which he had no room to hang.

He brought them home with him on his way back from the City, generally

after dark, and would enter this room on Sunday afternoons, to spend

hours turning the pictures to the light, examining the marks on their

backs, and occasionally making notes.

They were nearly all landscapes with figures in the foreground, a

sign of some mysterious revolt against London, its tall houses, its

interminable streets, where his life and the lives of his breed and

class were passed. Every now and then he would take one or two pictures

away with him in a cab, and stop at Jobson's on his way into the City.

He rarely showed them to anyone; Irene, whose opinion he secretly

respected and perhaps for that reason never solicited, had only been

into the room on rare occasions, in discharge of some wifely duty. She

was not asked to look at the pictures, and she never did. To Soames this

was another grievance. He hated that pride of hers, and secretly dreaded

it.

In the plate-glass window of the picture shop his image stood and looked

at him.

His sleek hair under the brim of the tall hat had a sheen like the hat

itself; his cheeks, pale and flat, the line of his clean-shaven lips,

his firm chin with its greyish shaven tinge, and the buttoned strictness

of his black cut-away coat, conveyed an appearance of reserve

and secrecy, of imperturbable, enforced composure; but his eyes,

cold,--grey, strained--looking, with a line in the brow between them,

examined him wistfully, as if they knew of a secret weakness.

He noted the subjects of the pictures, the names of the painters, made

a calculation of their values, but without the satisfaction he usually

derived from this inward appraisement, and walked on.

No. 62 would do well enough for another year, if he decided to build!

The times were good for building, money had not been so dear for years;

and the site he had seen at Robin Hill, when he had gone down there in

the spring to inspect the Nicholl mortgage--what could be better! Within

twelve miles of Hyde Park Corner, the value of the land certain to go

up, would always fetch more than he gave for it; so that a house, if

built in really good style, was a first-class investment.

The notion of being the one member of his family with a country house

weighed but little with him; for to a true Forsyte, sentiment, even the

sentiment of social position, was a luxury only to be indulged in after

his appetite for more material pleasure had been satisfied.

To get Irene out of London, away from opportunities of going about and

seeing people, away from her friends and those who put ideas into her

head! That was the thing! She was too thick with June! June disliked

him. He returned the sentiment. They were of the same blood.

It would be everything to get Irene out of town. The house would please

her, she would enjoy messing about with the decoration, she was very

artistic!

The house must be in good style, something that would always be certain

to command a price, something unique, like that last house of Parkes,

which had a tower; but Parkes had himself said that his architect was

ruinous. You never knew where you were with those fellows; if they had

a name they ran you into no end of expense and were conceited into the

bargain.

And a common architect was no good--the memory of Parkes' tower

precluded the employment of a common architect:

This was why he had thought of Bosinney. Since the dinner at Swithin's

he had made enquiries, the result of which had been meagre, but

encouraging: "One of the new school."

"Clever?"

"As clever as you like--a bit--a bit up in the air!"

He had not been able to discover what houses Bosinney had built, nor

what his charges were. The impression he gathered was that he would be

able to make his own terms. The more he reflected on the idea, the more

he liked it. It would be keeping the thing in the family, with Forsytes

almost an instinct; and he would be able to get 'favoured-nation,' if

not nominal terms--only fair, considering the chance to Bosinney of

displaying his talents, for this house must be no common edifice.

Soames reflected complacently on the work it would be sure to bring the

young man; for, like every Forsyte, he could be a thorough optimist when

there was anything to be had out of it.

Bosinney's office was in Sloane Street, close at, hand, so that he would

be able to keep his eye continually on the plans.

Again, Irene would not be to likely to object to leave London if her

greatest friend's lover were given the job. June's marriage might depend

on it. Irene could not decently stand in the way of June's marriage; she

would never do that, he knew her too well. And June would be pleased; of

this he saw the advantage.

Bosinney looked clever, but he had also--and--it was one of his great

attractions--an air as if he did not quite know on which side his bread

were buttered; he should be easy to deal with in money matters. Soames

made this reflection in no defrauding spirit; it was the natural

attitude of his mind--of the mind of any good business man--of all those

thousands of good business men through whom he was threading his way up

Ludgate Hill.

Thus he fulfilled the inscrutable laws of his great class--of human

nature itself--when he reflected, with a sense of comfort, that Bosinney

would be easy to deal with in money matters.

While he elbowed his way on, his eyes, which he usually kept fixed on

the ground before his feet, were attracted upwards by the dome of St.

Paul's. It had a peculiar fascination for him, that old dome, and

not once, but twice or three times a week, would he halt in his daily

pilgrimage to enter beneath and stop in the side aisles for five or

ten minutes, scrutinizing the names and epitaphs on the monuments. The

attraction for him of this great church was inexplicable, unless it

enabled him to concentrate his thoughts on the business of the day. If

any affair of particular moment, or demanding peculiar acuteness, was

weighing on his mind, he invariably went in, to wander with mouse-like

attention from epitaph to epitaph. Then retiring in the same noiseless

way, he would hold steadily on up Cheapside, a thought more of dogged

purpose in his gait, as though he had seen something which he had made

up his mind to buy.

He went in this morning, but, instead of stealing from monument to

monument, turned his eyes upwards to the columns and spacings of the

walls, and remained motionless.

His uplifted face, with the awed and wistful look which faces take on

themselves in church, was whitened to a chalky hue in the vast building.

His gloved hands were clasped in front over the handle of his umbrella.

He lifted them. Some sacred inspiration perhaps had come to him.

'Yes,' he thought, 'I must have room to hang my pictures.

That evening, on his return from the City, he called at Bosinney's

office. He found the architect in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a pipe, and

ruling off lines on a plan. Soames refused a drink, and came at once to

the point.

"If you've nothing better to do on Sunday, come down with me to Robin

Hill, and give me your opinion on a building site."

"Are you going to build?"

"Perhaps," said Soames; "but don't speak of it. I just want your

opinion."

"Quite so," said the architect.

Soames peered about the room.

"You're rather high up here," he remarked.

Any information he could gather about the nature and scope of Bosinney's

business would be all to the good.

"It does well enough for me so far," answered the architect. "You're

accustomed to the swells."

He knocked out his pipe, but replaced it empty between his teeth; it

assisted him perhaps to carry on the conversation. Soames noted a hollow

in each cheek, made as it were by suction.

"What do you pay for an office like this?" said he.

"Fifty too much," replied Bosinney.

This answer impressed Soames favourably.

"I suppose it is dear," he said. "I'll call for you--on Sunday about

eleven."

The following Sunday therefore he called for Bosinney in a hansom, and

drove him to the station. On arriving at Robin Hill, they found no cab,

and started to walk the mile and a half to the site.

It was the 1st of August--a perfect day, with a burning sun and

cloudless sky--and in the straight, narrow road leading up the hill

their feet kicked up a yellow dust.

"Gravel soil," remarked Soames, and sideways he glanced at the coat

Bosinney wore. Into the side-pockets of this coat were thrust bundles

of papers, and under one arm was carried a queer-looking stick. Soames

noted these and other peculiarities.

No one but a clever man, or, indeed, a buccaneer, would have taken such

liberties with his appearance; and though these eccentricities were

revolting to Soames, he derived a certain satisfaction from them, as

evidence of qualities by which he must inevitably profit. If the fellow

could build houses, what did his clothes matter?

"I told you," he said, "that I want this house to be a surprise, so

don't say anything about it. I never talk of my affairs until they're

carried through."

Bosinney nodded.

"Let women into your plans," pursued Soames, "and you never know where

it'll end."

"Ah!" Said Bosinney, "women are the devil!"

This feeling had long been at the--bottom of Soames's heart; he had

never, however, put it into words.

"Oh!" he Muttered, "so you're beginning to...." He stopped, but added,

with an uncontrollable burst of spite: "June's got a temper of her

own--always had."

"A temper's not a bad thing in an angel."

Soames had never called Irene an angel. He could not so have violated

his best instincts, letting other people into the secret of her value,

and giving himself away. He made no reply.

They had struck into a half-made road across a warren. A cart-track led

at right-angles to a gravel pit, beyond which the chimneys of a cottage

rose amongst a clump of trees at the border of a thick wood. Tussocks of

feathery grass covered the rough surface of the ground, and out of these

the larks soared into the haze of sunshine. On the far horizon, over a

countless succession of fields and hedges, rose a line of downs.

Soames led till they had crossed to the far side, and there he stopped.

It was the chosen site; but now that he was about to divulge the spot to

another he had become uneasy.

"The agent lives in that cottage," he said; "he'll give us some

lunch--we'd better have lunch before we go into this matter."

He again took the lead to the cottage, where the agent, a tall man named

Oliver, with a heavy face and grizzled beard, welcomed them. During

lunch, which Soames hardly touched, he kept looking at Bosinney, and

once or twice passed his silk handkerchief stealthily over his forehead.

The meal came to an end at last, and Bosinney rose.

"I dare say you've got business to talk over," he said; "I'll just go

and nose about a bit." Without waiting for a reply he strolled out.

Soames was solicitor to this estate, and he spent nearly an hour in the

agent's company, looking at ground-plans and discussing the Nicholl and

other mortgages; it was as it were by an afterthought that he brought up

the question of the building site.

"Your people," he said, "ought to come down in their price to me,

considering that I shall be the first to build."

Oliver shook his head.

The site you've fixed on, Sir, he said, "is the cheapest we've got.

Sites at the top of the slope are dearer by a good bit."

"Mind," said Soames, "I've not decided; it's quite possible I shan't

build at all. The ground rent's very high."

"Well, Mr. Forsyte, I shall be sorry if you go off, and I think you'll

make a mistake, Sir. There's not a bit of land near London with such a

view as this, nor one that's cheaper, all things considered; we've only

to advertise, to get a mob of people after it."

They looked at each other. Their faces said very plainly: 'I respect

you as a man of business; and you can't expect me to believe a word you

say.'

Well, repeated Soames, "I haven't made up my mind; the thing will very

likely go off!" With these words, taking up his umbrella, he put his

chilly hand into the agent's, withdrew it without the faintest pressure,

and went out into the sun.

He walked slowly back towards the site in deep thought. His instinct

told him that what the agent had said was true. A cheap site. And the

beauty of it was, that he knew the agent did not really think it cheap;

so that his own intuitive knowledge was a victory over the agent's.

'Cheap or not, I mean to have it,' he thought.

The larks sprang up in front of his feet, the air was full of

butterflies, a sweet fragrance rose from the wild grasses. The sappy

scent of the bracken stole forth from the wood, where, hidden in the

depths, pigeons were cooing, and from afar on the warm breeze, came the

rhythmic chiming of church bells.

Soames walked with his eyes on the ground, his lips opening and closing

as though in anticipation of a delicious morsel. But when he arrived

at the site, Bosinney was nowhere to be seen. After waiting some little

time, he crossed the warren in the direction of the slope. He would have

shouted, but dreaded the sound of his voice.

The warren was as lonely as a prairie, its silence only broken by the

rustle of rabbits bolting to their holes, and the song of the larks.

Soames, the pioneer-leader of the great Forsyte army advancing to

the civilization of this wilderness, felt his spirit daunted by the

loneliness, by the invisible singing, and the hot, sweet air. He had

begun to retrace his steps when he at last caught sight of Bosinney.

The architect was sprawling under a large oak tree, whose trunk, with a

huge spread of bough and foliage, ragged with age, stood on the verge of

the rise.

Soames had to touch him on the shoulder before he looked up.

"Hallo! Forsyte," he said, "I've found the very place for your house!

Look here!"

Soames stood and looked, then he said, coldly:

"You may be very clever, but this site will cost me half as much again."

"Hang the cost, man. Look at the view!"

Almost from their feet stretched ripe corn, dipping to a small dark

copse beyond. A plain of fields and hedges spread to the distant

grey-bluedowns. In a silver streak to the right could be seen the line

of the river.

The sky was so blue, and the sun so bright, that an eternal summer

seemed to reign over this prospect. Thistledown floated round them,

enraptured by the serenity, of the ether. The heat danced over the

corn, and, pervading all, was a soft, insensible hum, like the murmur of

bright minutes holding revel between earth and heaven.

Soames looked. In spite of himself, something swelled in his breast.

To live here in sight of all this, to be able to point it out to his

friends, to talk of it, to possess it! His cheeks flushed. The warmth,

the radiance, the glow, were sinking into his senses as, four years

before, Irene's beauty had sunk into his senses and made him long

for her. He stole a glance at Bosinney, whose eyes, the eyes of the

coachman's 'half-tame leopard,' seemed running wild over the landscape.

The sunlight had caught the promontories of the fellow's face, the bumpy

cheekbones, the point of his chin, the vertical ridges above his brow;

and Soames watched this rugged, enthusiastic, careless face with an

unpleasant feeling.

A long, soft ripple of wind flowed over the corn, and brought a puff of

warm air into their faces.

"I could build you a teaser here," said Bosinney, breaking the silence

at last.

"I dare say," replied Soames, drily. "You haven't got to pay for it."

"For about eight thousand I could build you a palace."

Soames had become very pale--a struggle was going on within him. He

dropped his eyes, and said stubbornly:

"I can't afford it."

And slowly, with his mousing walk, he led the way back to the first

site.

They spent some time there going into particulars of the projected

house, and then Soames returned to the agent's cottage.

He came out in about half an hour, and, joining Bosinney, started for

the station.

"Well," he said, hardly opening his lips, "I've taken that site of

yours, after all."

And again he was silent, confusedly debating how it was that this

fellow, whom by habit he despised, should have overborne his own

decision.

CHAPTER V--A FORSYTE MENAGE

Like the enlightened thousands of his class and generation in this great

city of London, who no longer believe in red velvet chairs, and know

that groups of modern Italian marble are 'vieux jeu,' Soames Forsyte

inhabited a house which did what it could. It owned a copper door

knocker of individual design, windows which had been altered to open

outwards, hanging flower boxes filled with fuchsias, and at the back

(a great feature) a little court tiled with jade-green tiles, and

surrounded by pink hydrangeas in peacock-blue tubs. Here, under a

parchment-coloured Japanese sunshade covering the whole end, inhabitants

or visitors could be screened from the eyes of the curious while they

drank tea and examined at their leisure the latest of Soames's little

silver boxes.

The inner decoration favoured the First Empire and William Morris.

For its size, the house was commodious; there were countless nooks

resembling birds' nests, and little things made of silver were deposited

like eggs.

In this general perfection two kinds of fastidiousness were at war.

There lived here a mistress who would have dwelt daintily on a desert

island; a master whose daintiness was, as it were, an investment,

cultivated by the owner for his advancement, in accordance with the laws

of competition. This competitive daintiness had caused Soames in his

Marlborough days to be the first boy into white waistcoats in summer,

and corduroy waistcoats in winter, had prevented him from ever appearing

in public with his tie climbing up his collar, and induced him to dust

his patent leather boots before a great multitude assembled on Speech

Day to hear him recite Moliere.

Skin-like immaculateness had grown over Soames, as over many Londoners;

impossible to conceive of him with a hair out of place, a tie deviating

one-eighth of an inch from the perpendicular, a collar unglossed! He

would not have gone without a bath for worlds--it was the fashion to

take baths; and how bitter was his scorn of people who omitted them!

But Irene could be imagined, like some nymph, bathing in wayside

streams, for the joy of the freshness and of seeing her own fair body.

In this conflict throughout the house the woman had gone to the wall. As

in the struggle between Saxon and Celt still going on within the nation,

the more impressionable and receptive temperament had had forced on it a

conventional superstructure.

Thus the house had acquired a close resemblance to hundreds of other

houses with the same high aspirations, having become: 'That very

charming little house of the Soames Forsytes, quite individual, my

dear--really elegant.'

For Soames Forsyte--read James Peabody, Thomas Atkins, or Emmanuel

Spagnoletti, the name in fact of any upper-middle class Englishman

in London with any pretensions to taste; and though the decoration be

different, the phrase is just.

On the evening of August 8, a week after the expedition to Robin Hill,

in the dining-room of this house--'quite individual, my dear--really

elegant'--Soames and Irene were seated at dinner. A hot dinner on

Sundays was a little distinguishing elegance common to this house and

many others. Early in married life Soames had laid down the rule: 'The

servants must give us hot dinner on Sundays--they've nothing to do but

play the concertina.'

The custom had produced no revolution. For--to Soames a rather

deplorable sign--servants were devoted to Irene, who, in defiance of

all safe tradition, appeared to recognise their right to a share in the

weaknesses of human nature.

The happy pair were seated, not opposite each other, but rectangularly,

at the handsome rosewood table; they dined without a cloth--a

distinguishing elegance--and so far had not spoken a word.

Soames liked to talk during dinner about business, or what he had been

buying, and so long as he talked Irene's silence did not distress him.

This evening he had found it impossible to talk. The decision to build

had been weighing on his mind all the week, and he had made up his mind

to tell her.

His nervousness about this disclosure irritated him profoundly; she had

no business to make him feel like that--a wife and a husband being

one person. She had not looked at him once since they sat down; and he

wondered what on earth she had been thinking about all the time. It was

hard, when a man worked as he did, making money for her--yes, and with

an ache in his heart--that she should sit there, looking--looking as if

she saw the walls of the room closing in. It was enough to make a man

get up and leave the table.

The light from the rose-shaded lamp fell on her neck and arms--Soames

liked her to dine in a low dress, it gave him an inexpressible feeling

of superiority to the majority of his acquaintance, whose wives were

contented with their best high frocks or with tea-gowns, when they dined

at home. Under that rosy light her amber-coloured hair and fair skin

made strange contrast with her dark brown eyes.

Could a man own anything prettier than this dining-table with its deep

tints, the starry, soft-petalled roses, the ruby-coloured glass, and

quaint silver furnishing; could a man own anything prettier than the

woman who sat at it? Gratitude was no virtue among Forsytes, who,

competitive, and full of common-sense, had no occasion for it; and

Soames only experienced a sense of exasperation amounting to pain, that

he did not own her as it was his right to own her, that he could not,

as by stretching out his hand to that rose, pluck her and sniff the very

secrets of her heart.

Out of his other property, out of all the things he had collected, his

silver, his pictures, his houses, his investments, he got a secret and

intimate feeling; out of her he got none.

In this house of his there was writing on every wall. His business-like

temperament protested against a mysterious warning that she was not made

for him. He had married this woman, conquered her, made her his own, and

it seemed to him contrary to the most fundamental of all laws, the law

of possession, that he could do no more than own her body--if indeed he

could do that, which he was beginning to doubt. If any one had asked him

if he wanted to own her soul, the question would have seemed to him both

ridiculous and sentimental. But he did so want, and the writing said he

never would.

She was ever silent, passive, gracefully averse; as though terrified

lest by word, motion, or sign she might lead him to believe that she was

fond of him; and he asked himself: Must I always go on like this?

Like most novel readers of his generation (and Soames was a great novel

reader), literature coloured his view of life; and he had imbibed the

belief that it was only a question of time.

In the end the husband always gained the affection of his wife. Even

in those cases--a class of book he was not very fond of--which ended in

tragedy, the wife always died with poignant regrets on her lips, or if

it were the husband who died--unpleasant thought--threw herself on his

body in an agony of remorse.

He often took Irene to the theatre, instinctively choosing the modern

Society Plays with the modern Society conjugal problem, so fortunately

different from any conjugal problem in real life. He found that they too

always ended in the same way, even when there was a lover in the case.

While he was watching the play Soames often sympathized with the lover;

but before he reached home again, driving with Irene in a hansom, he saw

that this would not do, and he was glad the play had ended as it had.

There was one class of husband that had just then come into fashion,

the strong, rather rough, but extremely sound man, who was peculiarly

successful at the end of the play; with this person Soames was really

not in sympathy, and had it not been for his own position, would have

expressed his disgust with the fellow. But he was so conscious of

how vital to himself was the necessity for being a successful, even a

'strong,' husband, that he never spoke of a distaste born perhaps by

the perverse processes of Nature out of a secret fund of brutality in

himself.

But Irene's silence this evening was exceptional. He had never before

seen such an expression on her face. And since it is always the unusual

which alarms, Soames was alarmed. He ate his savoury, and hurried the

maid as she swept off the crumbs with the silver sweeper. When she had

left the room, he filled his glass with wine and said:

"Anybody been here this afternoon?"

"June."

"What did she want?" It was an axiom with the Forsytes that people did

not go anywhere unless they wanted something. "Came to talk about her

lover, I suppose?"

Irene made no reply.

"It looks to me," continued Soames, "as if she were sweeter on him than

he is on her. She's always following him about."

Irene's eyes made him feel uncomfortable.

"You've no business to say such a thing!" she exclaimed.

"Why not? Anybody can see it."

"They cannot. And if they could, it's disgraceful to say so."

Soames's composure gave way.

"You're a pretty wife!" he said. But secretly he wondered at the heat of

her reply; it was unlike her. "You're cracked about June! I can tell

you one thing: now that she has the Buccaneer in tow, she doesn't care

twopence about you, and, you'll find it out. But you won't see so much

of her in future; we're going to live in the country."

He had been glad to get his news out under cover of this burst of

irritation. He had expected a cry of dismay; the silence with which his

pronouncement was received alarmed him.

"You don't seem interested," he was obliged to add.

"I knew it already."

He looked at her sharply.

"Who told you?"

"June."

"How did she know?"

Irene did not answer. Baffled and uncomfortable, he said:

"It's a fine thing for Bosinney, it'll be the making of him. I suppose

she's told you all about it?"

"Yes."

There was another pause, and then Soames said:

"I suppose you don't want to, go?"

Irene made no reply.

"Well, I can't tell what you want. You never seem contented here."

"Have my wishes anything to do with it?"

She took the vase of roses and left the room. Soames remained seated.

Was it for this that he had signed that contract? Was it for this that

he was going to spend some ten thousand pounds? Bosinney's phrase came

back to him: "Women are the devil!"

But presently he grew calmer. It might have, been worse. She might have

flared up. He had expected something more than this. It was lucky, after

all, that June had broken the ice for him. She must have wormed it out

of Bosinney; he might have known she would.

He lighted his cigarette. After all, Irene had not made a scene! She

would come round--that was the best of her; she was cold, but not sulky.

And, puffing the cigarette smoke at a lady-bird on the shining table,

he plunged into a reverie about the house. It was no good worrying; he

would go and make it up presently. She would be sitting out there in the

dark, under the Japanese sunshade, knitting. A beautiful, warm night....

In truth, June had come in that afternoon with shining eyes, and the

words: "Soames is a brick! It's splendid for Phil--the very thing for

him!"

Irene's face remaining dark and puzzled, she went on:

"Your new house at Robin Hill, of course. What? Don't you know?"

Irene did not know.

"Oh! then, I suppose I oughtn't to have told you!" Looking impatiently

at her friend, she cried: "You look as if you didn't care. Don't you

see, it's what I've' been praying for--the very chance he's been wanting

all this time. Now you'll see what he can do;" and thereupon she poured

out the whole story.

Since her own engagement she had not seemed much interested in her

friend's position; the hours she spent with Irene were given to

confidences of her own; and at times, for all her affectionate pity,

it was impossible to keep out of her smile a trace of compassionate

contempt for the woman who had made such a mistake in her life--such a

vast, ridiculous mistake.

"He's to have all the decorations as well--a free hand. It's perfect--"

June broke into laughter, her little figure quivered gleefully; she

raised her hand, and struck a blow at a muslin curtain. "Do you, know

I even asked Uncle James...." But, with a sudden dislike to mentioning

that incident, she stopped; and presently, finding her friend so

unresponsive, went away. She looked back from the pavement, and Irene

was still standing in the doorway. In response to her farewell wave,

Irene put her hand to her brow, and, turning slowly, shut the door....

Soames went to the drawing-room presently, and peered at her through the

window.

Out in the shadow of the Japanese sunshade she was sitting very still,

the lace on her white shoulders stirring with the soft rise and fall of

her bosom.

But about this silent creature sitting there so motionless, in the dark,

there seemed a warmth, a hidden fervour of feeling, as if the whole of

her being had been stirred, and some change were taking place in its

very depths.

He stole back to the dining-room unnoticed.

CHAPTER VI--JAMES AT LARGE

It was not long before Soames's determination to build went the round

of the family, and created the flutter that any decision connected with

property should make among Forsytes.

It was not his fault, for he had been determined that no one should

know. June, in the fulness of her heart, had told Mrs. Small, giving her

leave only to tell Aunt Ann--she thought it would cheer her, the poor

old sweet! for Aunt Ann had kept her room now for many days.

Mrs. Small told Aunt Ann at once, who, smiling as she lay back on her

pillows, said in her distinct, trembling old voice:

"It's very nice for dear June; but I hope they will be careful--it's

rather dangerous!"

When she was left alone again, a frown, like a cloud presaging a rainy

morrow, crossed her face.

While she was lying there so many days the process of recharging her

will went on all the time; it spread to her face, too, and tightening

movements were always in action at the corners of her lips.

The maid Smither, who had been in her service since girlhood, and was

spoken of as "Smither--a good girl--but so slow!"--the maid Smither

performed every morning with extreme punctiliousness the crowning

ceremony of that ancient toilet. Taking from the recesses of their pure

white band-box those flat, grey curls, the insignia of personal dignity,

she placed them securely in her mistress's hands, and turned her back.

And every day Aunts Juley and Hester were required to come and report

on Timothy; what news there was of Nicholas; whether dear June had

succeeded in getting Jolyon to shorten the engagement, now that Mr.

Bosinney was building Soames a house; whether young Roger's wife was

really--expecting; how the operation on Archie had succeeded; and what

Swithin had done about that empty house in Wigmore Street, where the

tenant had lost all his money and treated him so badly; above all, about

Soames; was Irene still--still asking for a separate room? And every

morning Smither was told: "I shall be coming down this afternoon,

Smither, about two o'clock. I shall want your arm, after all these days

in bed!"

After telling Aunt Ann, Mrs. Small had spoken of the house in the

strictest confidence to Mrs. Nicholas, who in her turn had asked

Winifred Dartie for confirmation, supposing, of course, that, being

Soames's sister, she would know all about it. Through her it had in

due course come round to the ears of James. He had been a good deal

agitated.

"Nobody," he said, "told him anything." And, rather than go direct to

Soames himself, of whose taciturnity he was afraid, he took his umbrella

and went round to Timothy's.

He found Mrs. Septimus and Hester (who had been told--she was so safe,

she found it tiring to talk) ready, and indeed eager, to discuss the

news. It was very good of dear Soames, they thought, to employ Mr.

Bosinney, but rather risky. What had George named him? 'The Buccaneer'

How droll! But George was always droll! However, it would be all in

the family they supposed they must really look upon Mr. Bosinney as

belonging to the family, though it seemed strange.

James here broke in:

"Nobody knows anything about him. I don't see what Soames wants with a

young man like that. I shouldn't be surprised if Irene had put her oar

in. I shall speak to...."

"Soames," interposed Aunt Juley, "told Mr. Bosinney that he didn't wish

it mentioned. He wouldn't like it to be talked about, I'm sure, and if

Timothy knew he would be very vexed, I...."

James put his hand behind his ear:

"What?" he said. "I'm getting very deaf. I suppose I don't hear people.

Emily's got a bad toe. We shan't be able to start for Wales till the

end of the month. There's always something!" And, having got what he

wanted, he took his hat and went away.

It was a fine afternoon, and he walked across the Park towards Soames's,

where he intended to dine, for Emily's toe kept her in bed, and Rachel

and Cicely were on a visit to the country. He took the slanting path

from the Bayswater side of the Row to the Knightsbridge Gate, across a

pasture of short, burnt grass, dotted with blackened sheep, strewn

with seated couples and strange waifs; lying prone on their faces, like

corpses on a field over which the wave of battle has rolled.

He walked rapidly, his head bent, looking neither to right nor, left.

The appearance of this park, the centre of his own battle-field, where

he had all his life been fighting, excited no thought or speculation

in his mind. These corpses flung down, there, from out the press and

turmoil of the struggle, these pairs of lovers sitting cheek by jowl for

an hour of idle Elysium snatched from the monotony of their treadmill,

awakened no fancies in his mind; he had outlived that kind of

imagination; his nose, like the nose of a sheep, was fastened to the

pastures on which he browsed.

One of his tenants had lately shown a disposition to be behind-hand in

his rent, and it had become a grave question whether he had not better

turn him out at once, and so run the risk of not re-letting before

Christmas. Swithin had just been let in very badly, but it had served

him right--he had held on too long.

He pondered this as he walked steadily, holding his umbrella carefully

by the wood, just below the crook of the handle, so as to keep the

ferule off the ground, and not fray the silk in the middle. And, with

his thin, high shoulders stooped, his long legs moving with swift

mechanical precision, this passage through the Park, where the sun shone

with a clear flame on so much idleness--on so many human evidences of

the remorseless battle of Property, raging beyond its ring--was like the

flight of some land bird across the sea.

He felt a touch on the arm as he came out at Albert Gate.

It was Soames, who, crossing from the shady side of Piccadilly, where he

had been walking home from the office, had suddenly appeared alongside.

"Your mother's in bed," said James; "I was, just coming to you, but I

suppose I shall be in the way."

The outward relations between James and his son were marked by a lack

of sentiment peculiarly Forsytean, but for all that the two were by no

means unattached. Perhaps they regarded one another as an investment;

certainly they were solicitous of each other's welfare, glad of each

other's company. They had never exchanged two words upon the more

intimate problems of life, or revealed in each other's presence the

existence of any deep feeling.

Something beyond the power of word-analysis bound them together,

something hidden deep in the fibre of nations and families--for blood,

they say, is thicker than water--and neither of them was a cold-blooded

man. Indeed, in James love of his children was now the prime motive of

his existence. To have creatures who were parts of himself, to whom he

might transmit the money he saved, was at the root of his saving;

and, at seventy-five, what was left that could give him pleasure,

but--saving? The kernel of life was in this saving for his children.

Than James Forsyte, notwithstanding all his 'Jonah-isms,' there was

no saner man (if the leading symptom of sanity, as we are told, is

self-preservation, though without doubt Timothy went too far) in all

this London, of which he owned so much, and loved with such a dumb love,

as the centre of his opportunities. He had the marvellous instinctive

sanity of the middle class. In him--more than in Jolyon, with his

masterful will and his moments of tenderness and philosophy--more

than in Swithin, the martyr to crankiness--Nicholas, the sufferer from

ability--and Roger, the victim of enterprise--beat the true pulse of

compromise; of all the brothers he was least remarkable in mind and

person, and for that reason more likely to live for ever.

To James, more than to any of the others, was "the family" significant

and dear. There had always been something primitive and cosy in his

attitude towards life; he loved the family hearth, he loved gossip, and

he loved grumbling. All his decisions were formed of a cream which he

skimmed off the family mind; and, through that family, off the minds

of thousands of other families of similar fibre. Year after year,

week after week, he went to Timothy's, and in his brother's front

drawing-room--his legs twisted, his long white whiskers framing his

clean-shaven mouth--would sit watching the family pot simmer, the cream

rising to the top; and he would go away sheltered, refreshed, comforted,

with an indefinable sense of comfort.

Beneath the adamant of his self-preserving instinct there was much real

softness in James; a visit to Timothy's was like an hour spent in the

lap of a mother; and the deep craving he himself had for the protection

of the family wing reacted in turn on his feelings towards his own

children; it was a nightmare to him to think of them exposed to the

treatment of the world, in money, health, or reputation. When his old

friend John Street's son volunteered for special service, he shook his

head querulously, and wondered what John Street was about to allow it;

and when young Street was assagaied, he took it so much to heart that he

made a point of calling everywhere with the special object of saying: He

knew how it would be--he'd no patience with them!

When his son-in-law Dartie had that financial crisis, due to speculation

in Oil Shares, James made himself ill worrying over it; the knell of all

prosperity seemed to have sounded. It took him three months and a visit

to Baden-Baden to get better; there was something terrible in the idea

that but for his, James's, money, Dartie's name might have appeared in

the Bankruptcy List.

Composed of a physiological mixture so sound that if he had an earache

he thought he was dying, he regarded the occasional ailments of his

wife and children as in the nature of personal grievances, special

interventions of Providence for the purpose of destroying his peace of

mind; but he did not believe at all in the ailments of people outside

his own immediate family, affirming them in every case to be due to

neglected liver.

His universal comment was: "What can they expect? I have it myself, if

I'm not careful!"

When he went to Soames's that evening he felt that life was hard on him:

There was Emily with a bad toe, and Rachel gadding about in the country;

he got no sympathy from anybody; and Ann, she was ill--he did not

believe she would last through the summer; he had called there three

times now without her being able to see him! And this idea of Soames's,

building a house, that would have to be looked into. As to the trouble

with Irene, he didn't know what was to come of that--anything might come

of it!

He entered 62, Montpellier Square with the fullest intentions of being

miserable. It was already half-past seven, and Irene, dressed

for dinner, was seated in the drawing-room. She was wearing her

gold-coloured frock--for, having been displayed at a dinner-party, a

soiree, and a dance, it was now to be worn at home--and she had

adorned the bosom with a cascade of lace, on which James's eyes riveted

themselves at once.

"Where do you get your things?" he said in an aggravated voice. "I never

see Rachel and Cicely looking half so well. That rose-point, now--that's

not real!"

Irene came close, to prove to him that he was in error.

And, in spite of himself, James felt the influence of her deference,

of the faint seductive perfume exhaling from her. No self-respecting

Forsyte surrendered at a blow; so he merely said: He didn't know--he

expected she was spending a pretty penny on dress.

The gong sounded, and, putting her white arm within his, Irene took him

into the dining-room. She seated him in Soames's usual place, round the

corner on her left. The light fell softly there, so that he would not

be worried by the gradual dying of the day; and she began to talk to him

about himself.

Presently, over James came a change, like the mellowing that steals upon

a fruit in the sun; a sense of being caressed, and praised, and petted,

and all without the bestowal of a single caress or word of praise. He

felt that what he was eating was agreeing with him; he could not get

that feeling at home; he did not know when he had enjoyed a glass of

champagne so much, and, on inquiring the brand and price, was surprised

to find that it was one of which he had a large stock himself, but could

never drink; he instantly formed the resolution to let his wine merchant

know that he had been swindled.

Looking up from his food, he remarked:

"You've a lot of nice things about the place. Now, what did you give for

that sugar-sifter? Shouldn't wonder if it was worth money!"

He was particularly pleased with the appearance of a picture, on the

wall opposite, which he himself had given them:

"I'd no idea it was so good!" he said.

They rose to go into the drawing-room, and James followed Irene closely.

"That's what I call a capital little dinner," he murmured, breathing

pleasantly down on her shoulder; "nothing heavy--and not too

Frenchified. But I can't get it at home. I pay my cook sixty pounds a

year, but she can't give me a dinner like that!"

He had as yet made no allusion to the building of the house, nor did he

when Soames, pleading the excuse of business, betook himself to the room

at the top, where he kept his pictures.

James was left alone with his daughter-in-law. The glow of the wine,

and of an excellent liqueur, was still within him. He felt quite warm

towards her. She was really a taking little thing; she listened to you,

and seemed to understand what you were saying; and, while talking, he

kept examining her figure, from her bronze-coloured shoes to the waved

gold of her hair. She was leaning back in an Empire chair, her shoulders

poised against the top--her body, flexibly straight and unsupported

from the hips, swaying when she moved, as though giving to the arms of a

lover. Her lips were smiling, her eyes half-closed.

It may have been a recognition of danger in the very charm of her

attitude, or a twang of digestion, that caused a sudden dumbness to fall

on James. He did not remember ever having been quite alone with Irene

before. And, as he looked at her, an odd feeling crept over him, as

though he had come across something strange and foreign.

Now what was she thinking about--sitting back like that?

Thus when he spoke it was in a sharper voice, as if he had been awakened

from a pleasant dream.

"What d'you do with yourself all day?" he said. "You never come round to

Park Lane!"

She seemed to be making very lame excuses, and James did not look at

her. He did not want to believe that she was really avoiding them--it

would mean too much.

"I expect the fact is, you haven't time," he said; "You're always

about with June. I expect you're useful to her with her young man,

chaperoning, and one thing and another. They tell me she's never at home

now; your Uncle Jolyon he doesn't like it, I fancy, being left so much

alone as he is. They tell me she's always hanging about for this young

Bosinney; I suppose he comes here every day. Now, what do you think of

him? D'you think he knows his own mind? He seems to me a poor thing. I

should say the grey mare was the better horse!"

The colour deepened in Irene's face; and James watched her suspiciously.

"Perhaps you don't quite understand Mr. Bosinney," she said.

"Don't understand him!" James hummed out: "Why not?--you can see he's

one of these artistic chaps. They say he's clever--they all think

they're clever. You know more about him than I do," he added; and again

his suspicious glance rested on her.

"He is designing a house for Soames," she said softly, evidently trying

to smooth things over.

"That brings me to what I was going to say," continued James; "I don't

know what Soames wants with a young man like that; why doesn't he go to

a first-rate man?"

"Perhaps Mr. Bosinney is first-rate!"

James rose, and took a turn with bent head.

"That's it'," he said, "you young people, you all stick together; you

all think you know best!"

Halting his tall, lank figure before her, he raised a finger, and

levelled it at her bosom, as though bringing an indictment against her

beauty:

"All I can say is, these artistic people, or whatever they call

themselves, they're as unreliable as they can be; and my advice to you

is, don't you have too much to do with him!"

Irene smiled; and in the curve of her lips was a strange provocation.

She seemed to have lost her deference. Her breast rose and fell as

though with secret anger; she drew her hands inwards from their rest on

the arms of her chair until the tips of her fingers met, and her dark

eyes looked unfathomably at James.

The latter gloomily scrutinized the floor.

"I tell you my opinion," he said, "it's a pity you haven't got a child

to think about, and occupy you!"

A brooding look came instantly on Irene's face, and even James became

conscious of the rigidity that took possession of her whole figure

beneath the softness of its silk and lace clothing.

He was frightened by the effect he had produced, and like most men with

but little courage, he sought at once to justify himself by bullying.

"You don't seem to care about going about. Why don't you drive down to

Hurlingham with us? And go to the theatre now and then. At your time of

life you ought to take an interest in things. You're a young woman!"

The brooding look darkened on her face; he grew nervous.

"Well, I know nothing about it," he said; "nobody tells me anything.

Soames ought to be able to take care of himself. If he can't take care

of himself he mustn't look to me--that's all."

Biting the corner of his forefinger he stole a cold, sharp look at his

daughter-in-law.

He encountered her eyes fixed on his own, so dark and deep, that he

stopped, and broke into a gentle perspiration.

"Well, I must be going," he said after a short pause, and a minute later

rose, with a slight appearance of surprise, as though he had expected

to be asked to stop. Giving his hand to Irene, he allowed himself to be

conducted to the door, and let out into the street. He would not have a

cab, he would walk, Irene was to say good-night to Soames for him, and

if she wanted a little gaiety, well, he would drive her down to Richmond

any day.

He walked home, and going upstairs, woke Emily out of the first sleep

she had had for four and twenty hours, to tell her that it was his

impression things were in a bad way at Soames's; on this theme he

descanted for half an hour, until at last, saying that he would not

sleep a wink, he turned on his side and instantly began to snore.

In Montpellier Square Soames, who had come from the picture room, stood

invisible at the top of the stairs, watching Irene sort the letters

brought by the last post. She turned back into the drawing-room; but in

a minute came out, and stood as if listening. Then she came stealing up

the stairs, with a kitten in her arms. He could see her face bent over

the little beast, which was purring against her neck. Why couldn't she

look at him like that?

Suddenly she saw him, and her face changed.

"Any letters for me?" he said.

"Three."

He stood aside, and without another word she passed on into the bedroom.

CHAPTER VII--OLD JOLYON'S PECCADILLO

Old Jolyon came out of Lord's cricket ground that same afternoon with

the intention of going home. He had not reached Hamilton Terrace before

he changed his mind, and hailing a cab, gave the driver an address in

Wistaria Avenue. He had taken a resolution.

June had hardly been at home at all that week; she had given him nothing

of her company for a long time past, not, in fact, since she had become

engaged to Bosinney. He never asked her for her company. It was not his

habit to ask people for things! She had just that one idea now--Bosinney

and his affairs--and she left him stranded in his great house, with a

parcel of servants, and not a soul to speak to from morning to night.

His Club was closed for cleaning; his Boards in recess; there was

nothing, therefore, to take him into the City. June had wanted him to go

away; she would not go herself, because Bosinney was in London.

But where was he to go by himself? He could not go abroad alone; the sea

upset his liver; he hated hotels. Roger went to a hydropathic--he was

not going to begin that at his time of life, those new-fangled places

we're all humbug!

With such formulas he clothed to himself the desolation of his spirit;

the lines down his face deepening, his eyes day by day looking forth

with the melancholy which sat so strangely on a face wont to be strong

and serene.

And so that afternoon he took this journey through St. John's Wood, in

the golden-light that sprinkled the rounded green bushes of the acacia's

before the little houses, in the summer sunshine that seemed holding a

revel over the little gardens; and he looked about him with interest;

for this was a district which no Forsyte entered without open

disapproval and secret curiosity.

His cab stopped in front of a small house of that peculiar buff colour

which implies a long immunity from paint. It had an outer gate, and a

rustic approach.

He stepped out, his bearing extremely composed; his massive head, with

its drooping moustache and wings of white hair, very upright, under an

excessively large top hat; his glance firm, a little angry. He had been

driven into this!

"Mrs. Jolyon Forsyte at home?"

"Oh, yes sir!--what name shall I say, if you please, sir?"

Old Jolyon could not help twinkling at the little maid as he gave his

name. She seemed to him such a funny little toad!

And he followed her through the dark hall, into a small double,

drawing-room, where the furniture was covered in chintz, and the little

maid placed him in a chair.

"They're all in the garden, sir; if you'll kindly take a seat, I'll tell

them."

Old Jolyon sat down in the chintz-covered chair, and looked around him.

The whole place seemed to him, as he would have expressed it, pokey;

there was a certain--he could not tell exactly what--air of shabbiness,

or rather of making two ends meet, about everything. As far as he could

see, not a single piece of furniture was worth a five-pound note.

The walls, distempered rather a long time ago, were decorated with

water-colour sketches; across the ceiling meandered a long crack.

These little houses were all old, second-rate concerns; he should hope

the rent was under a hundred a year; it hurt him more than he could have

said, to think of a Forsyte--his own son living in such a place.

The little maid came back. Would he please to go down into the garden?

Old Jolyon marched out through the French windows. In descending the

steps he noticed that they wanted painting.

Young Jolyon, his wife, his two children, and his dog Balthasar, were

all out there under a pear-tree.

This walk towards them was the most courageous act of old Jolyon's life;

but no muscle of his face moved, no nervous gesture betrayed him. He

kept his deep-set eyes steadily on the enemy.

In those two minutes he demonstrated to perfection all that unconscious

soundness, balance, and vitality of fibre that made, of him and so

many others of his class the core of the nation. In the unostentatious

conduct of their own affairs, to the neglect of everything else, they

typified the essential individualism, born in the Briton from the

natural isolation of his country's life.

The dog Balthasar sniffed round the edges of his trousers; this friendly

and cynical mongrel--offspring of a liaison between a Russian poodle and

a fox-terrier--had a nose for the unusual.

The strange greetings over, old Jolyon seated himself in a wicker chair,

and his two grandchildren, one on each side of his knees, looked at him

silently, never having seen so old a man.

They were unlike, as though recognising the difference set between

them by the circumstances of their births. Jolly, the child of sin,

pudgy-faced, with his tow-coloured hair brushed off his forehead, and a

dimple in his chin, had an air of stubborn amiability, and the eyes of a

Forsyte; little Holly, the child of wedlock, was a dark-skinned, solemn

soul, with her mother's, grey and wistful eyes.

The dog Balthasar, having walked round the three small flower-beds, to

show his extreme contempt for things at large, had also taken a seat in

front of old Jolyon, and, oscillating a tail curled by Nature tightly

over his back, was staring up with eyes that did not blink.

Even in the garden, that sense of things being pokey haunted old Jolyon;

the wicker chair creaked under his weight; the garden-beds looked

'daverdy'; on the far side, under the smut-stained wall, cats had made a

path.

While he and his grandchildren thus regarded each other with the

peculiar scrutiny, curious yet trustful, that passes between the very

young and the very old, young Jolyon watched his wife.

The colour had deepened in her thin, oval face, with its straight brows,

and large, grey eyes. Her hair, brushed in fine, high curves back from

her forehead, was going grey, like his own, and this greyness made the

sudden vivid colour in her cheeks painfully pathetic.

The look on her face, such as he had never seen there before, such as

she had always hidden from him, was full of secret resentments, and

longings, and fears. Her eyes, under their twitching brows, stared

painfully. And she was silent.

Jolly alone sustained the conversation; he had many possessions, and

was anxious that his unknown friend with extremely large moustaches, and

hands all covered with blue veins, who sat with legs crossed like his

own father (a habit he was himself trying to acquire), should know it;

but being a Forsyte, though not yet quite eight years old, he made

no mention of the thing at the moment dearest to his heart--a camp of

soldiers in a shop-window, which his father had promised to buy. No

doubt it seemed to him too precious; a tempting of Providence to mention

it yet.

And the sunlight played through the leaves on that little party of the

three generations grouped tranquilly under the pear-tree, which had long

borne no fruit.

Old Jolyon's furrowed face was reddening patchily, as old men's faces

redden in the sun. He took one of Jolly's hands in his own; the boy

climbed on to his knee; and little Holly, mesmerized by this sight,

crept up to them; the sound of the dog Balthasar's scratching arose

rhythmically.

Suddenly young Mrs. Jolyon got up and hurried indoors. A minute later

her husband muttered an excuse, and followed. Old Jolyon was left alone

with his grandchildren.

And Nature with her quaint irony began working in him one of her strange

revolutions, following her cyclic laws into the depths of his heart. And

that tenderness for little children, that passion for the beginnings of

life which had once made him forsake his son and follow June, now worked

in him to forsake June and follow these littler things. Youth, like a

flame, burned ever in his breast, and to youth he turned, to the round

little limbs, so reckless, that wanted care, to the small round faces

so unreasonably solemn or bright, to the treble tongues, and the shrill,

chuckling laughter, to the insistent tugging hands, and the feel of

small bodies against his legs, to all that was young and young, and once

more young. And his eyes grew soft, his voice, and thin-veined hands

soft, and soft his heart within him. And to those small creatures he

became at once a place of pleasure, a place where they were secure, and

could talk and laugh and play; till, like sunshine, there radiated from

old Jolyon's wicker chair the perfect gaiety of three hearts.

But with young Jolyon following to his wife's room it was different.

He found her seated on a chair before her dressing-glass, with her hands

before her face.

Her shoulders were shaking with sobs. This passion of hers for suffering

was mysterious to him. He had been through a hundred of these moods; how

he had survived them he never knew, for he could never believe they were

moods, and that the last hour of his partnership had not struck.

In the night she would be sure to throw her arms round his neck and say:

"Oh! Jo, how I make you suffer!" as she had done a hundred times before.

He reached out his hand, and, unseen, slipped his razor-case into his

pocket. 'I cannot stay here,' he thought, 'I must go down!' Without a

word he left the room, and went back to the lawn.

Old Jolyon had little Holly on his knee; she had taken possession of

his watch; Jolly, very red in the face, was trying to show that he could

stand on his head. The dog Balthasar, as close as he might be to the

tea-table, had fixed his eyes on the cake.

Young Jolyon felt a malicious desire to cut their enjoyment short.

What business had his father to come and upset his wife like this? It

was a shock, after all these years! He ought to have known; he ought to

have given them warning; but when did a Forsyte ever imagine that his

conduct could upset anybody! And in his thoughts he did old Jolyon

wrong.

He spoke sharply to the children, and told them to go in to their tea.

Greatly surprised, for they had never heard their father speak sharply

before, they went off, hand in hand, little Holly looking back over her

shoulder.

Young Jolyon poured out the tea.

"My wife's not the thing today," he said, but he knew well enough that

his father had penetrated the cause of that sudden withdrawal, and

almost hated the old man for sitting there so calmly.

"You've got a nice little house here," said old Jolyon with a shrewd

look; "I suppose you've taken a lease of it!"

Young Jolyon nodded.

"I don't like the neighbourhood," said old Jolyon; "a ramshackle lot."

Young Jolyon replied: "Yes, we're a ramshackle lot."'

The silence was now only broken by the sound of the dog Balthasar's

scratching.

Old Jolyon said simply: "I suppose I oughtn't to have come here, Jo; but

I get so lonely!"

At these words young Jolyon got up and put his hand on his father's

shoulder.

In the next house someone was playing over and over again: 'La Donna

mobile' on an untuned piano; and the little garden had fallen into

shade, the sun now only reached the wall at the end, whereon basked

a crouching cat, her yellow eyes turned sleepily down on the dog

Balthasar. There was a drowsy hum of very distant traffic; the creepered

trellis round the garden shut out everything but sky, and house, and

pear-tree, with its top branches still gilded by the sun.

For some time they sat there, talking but little. Then old Jolyon rose

to go, and not a word was said about his coming again.

He walked away very sadly. What a poor miserable place; and he thought

of the great, empty house in Stanhope Gate, fit residence for a Forsyte,

with its huge billiard-room and drawing-room that no one entered from

one week's end to another.

That woman, whose face he had rather liked, was too thin-skinned by

half; she gave Jo a bad time he knew! And those sweet children! Ah! what

a piece of awful folly!

He walked towards the Edgware Road, between rows of little houses, all

suggesting to him (erroneously no doubt, but the prejudices of a Forsyte

are sacred) shady histories of some sort or kind.

Society, forsooth, the chattering hags and jackanapes--had set

themselves up to pass judgment on his flesh and blood! A parcel of old

women! He stumped his umbrella on the ground, as though to drive it into

the heart of that unfortunate body, which had dared to ostracize his son

and his son's son, in whom he could have lived again!

He stumped his umbrella fiercely; yet he himself had followed Society's

behaviour for fifteen years--had only today been false to it!

He thought of June, and her dead mother, and the whole story, with all

his old bitterness. A wretched business!

He was a long time reaching Stanhope Gate, for, with native perversity,

being extremely tired, he walked the whole way.

After washing his hands in the lavatory downstairs, he went to the

dining-room to wait for dinner, the only room he used when June was

out--it was less lonely so. The evening paper had not yet come; he had

finished the Times, there was therefore nothing to do.

The room faced the backwater of traffic, and was very silent. He

disliked dogs, but a dog even would have been company. His gaze,

travelling round the walls, rested on a picture entitled: 'Group of

Dutch fishing boats at sunset'; the chef d'oeuvre of his collection. It

gave him no pleasure. He closed his eyes. He was lonely! He oughtn't

to complain, he knew, but he couldn't help it: He was a poor thing--had

always been a poor thing--no pluck! Such was his thought.

The butler came to lay the table for dinner, and seeing his master

apparently asleep, exercised extreme caution in his movements. This

bearded man also wore a moustache, which had given rise to grave doubts

in the minds of many members--of the family--, especially those who,

like Soames, had been to public schools, and were accustomed to niceness

in such matters. Could he really be considered a butler? Playful

spirits alluded to him as: 'Uncle Jolyon's Nonconformist'; George, the

acknowledged wag, had named him: 'Sankey.'

He moved to and fro between the great polished sideboard and the great

polished table inimitably sleek and soft.

Old Jolyon watched him, feigning sleep. The fellow was a sneak--he had

always thought so--who cared about nothing but rattling through his

work, and getting out to his betting or his woman or goodness knew what!

A slug! Fat too! And didn't care a pin about his master!

But then against his will, came one of those moments of philosophy which

made old Jolyon different from other Forsytes:

After all why should the man care? He wasn't paid to care, and why

expect it? In this world people couldn't look for affection unless they

paid for it. It might be different in the next--he didn't know--couldn't

tell! And again he shut his eyes.

Relentless and stealthy, the butler pursued his labours, taking things

from the various compartments of the sideboard. His back seemed always

turned to old Jolyon; thus, he robbed his operations of the unseemliness

of being carried on in his master's presence; now and then he furtively

breathed on the silver, and wiped it with a piece of chamois leather. He

appeared to pore over the quantities of wine in the decanters, which

he carried carefully and rather high, letting his head droop over them

protectingly. When he had finished, he stood for over a minute watching

his master, and in his greenish eyes there was a look of contempt:

After all, this master of his was an old buffer, who hadn't much left in

him!

Soft as a tom-cat, he crossed the room to press the bell. His orders

were 'dinner at seven.' What if his master were asleep; he would soon

have him out of that; there was the night to sleep in! He had himself to

think of, for he was due at his Club at half-past eight!

In answer to the ring, appeared a page boy with a silver soup tureen.

The butler took it from his hands and placed it on the table, then,

standing by the open door, as though about to usher company into the

room, he said in a solemn voice:

"Dinner is on the table, sir!"

Slowly old Jolyon got up out of his chair, and sat down at the table to

eat his dinner.

CHAPTER VIII--PLANS OF THE HOUSE

Forsytes, as is generally admitted, have shells, like that extremely

useful little animal which is made into Turkish delight, in other

words, they are never seen, or if seen would not be recognised, without

habitats, composed of circumstance, property, acquaintances, and wives,

which seem to move along with them in their passage through a world

composed of thousands of other Forsytes with their habitats. Without a

habitat a Forsyte is inconceivable--he would be like a novel without a

plot, which is well-known to be an anomaly.

To Forsyte eyes Bosinney appeared to have no habitat, he seemed one

of those rare and unfortunate men who go through life surrounded by

circumstance, property, acquaintances, and wives that do not belong to

them.

His rooms in Sloane Street, on the top floor, outside which, on a plate,

was his name, 'Philip Baynes Bosinney, Architect,' were not those of

a Forsyte.--He had no sitting-room apart from his office, but a large

recess had been screened off to conceal the necessaries of life--a

couch, an easy chair, his pipes, spirit case, novels and slippers. The

business part of the room had the usual furniture; an open cupboard with

pigeon-holes, a round oak table, a folding wash-stand, some hard chairs,

a standing desk of large dimensions covered with drawings and designs.

June had twice been to tea there under the chaperonage of his aunt.

He was believed to have a bedroom at the back.

As far as the family had been able to ascertain his income, it consisted

of two consulting appointments at twenty pounds a year, together with

an odd fee once in a way, and--more worthy item--a private annuity under

his father's will of one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

What had transpired concerning that father was not so reassuring. It

appeared that he had been a Lincolnshire country doctor of Cornish

extraction, striking appearance, and Byronic tendencies--a well-known

figure, in fact, in his county. Bosinney's uncle by marriage, Baynes,

of Baynes and Bildeboy, a Forsyte in instincts if not in name, had but

little that was worthy to relate of his brother-in-law.

"An odd fellow!' he would say: 'always spoke of his three eldest boys as

'good creatures, but so dull'; they're all doing capitally in the Indian

Civil! Philip was the only one he liked. I've heard him talk in the

queerest way; he once said to me: 'My dear fellow, never let your poor

wife know what you're thinking of! But I didn't follow his advice; not

I! An eccentric man! He would say to Phil: 'Whether you live like a

gentleman or not, my boy, be sure you die like one! and he had himself

embalmed in a frock coat suit, with a satin cravat and a diamond pin.

Oh, quite an original, I can assure you!"

Of Bosinney himself Baynes would speak warmly, with a certain

compassion: "He's got a streak of his father's Byronism. Why, look at

the way he threw up his chances when he left my office; going off like

that for six months with a knapsack, and all for what?--to study foreign

architecture--foreign! What could he expect? And there he is--a clever

young fellow--doesn't make his hundred a year! Now this engagement is

the best thing that could have happened--keep him steady; he's one

of those that go to bed all day and stay up all night, simply because

they've no method; but no vice about him--not an ounce of vice. Old

Forsyte's a rich man!"

Mr. Baynes made himself extremely pleasant to June, who frequently

visited his house in Lowndes Square at this period.

"This house of your cousin's--what a capital man of business--is the

very thing for Philip," he would say to her; "you mustn't expect to see

too much of him just now, my dear young lady. The good cause--the good

cause! The young man must make his way. When I was his age I was at work

day and night. My dear wife used to say to me, 'Bobby, don't work too

hard, think of your health'; but I never spared myself!"

June had complained that her lover found no time to come to Stanhope

Gate.

The first time he came again they had not been together a quarter of an

hour before, by one of those coincidences of which she was a mistress,

Mrs. Septimus Small arrived. Thereon Bosinney rose and hid himself,

according to previous arrangement, in the little study, to wait for her

departure.

"My dear," said Aunt Juley, "how thin he is! I've often noticed it

with engaged people; but you mustn't let it get worse. There's Barlow's

extract of veal; it did your Uncle Swithin a lot of good."

June, her little figure erect before the hearth, her small face

quivering grimly, for she regarded her aunt's untimely visit in the

light of a personal injury, replied with scorn:

"It's because he's busy; people who can do anything worth doing are

never fat!"

Aunt Juley pouted; she herself had always been thin, but the only

pleasure she derived from the fact was the opportunity of longing to be

stouter.

"I don't think," she said mournfully, "that you ought to let them call

him 'The Buccaneer'; people might think it odd, now that he's going

to build a house for Soames. I do hope he will be careful; it's so

important for him. Soames has such good taste!"

"Taste!" cried June, flaring up at once; "wouldn't give that for his

taste, or any of the family's!"

Mrs. Small was taken aback.

"Your Uncle Swithin," she said, "always had beautiful taste! And

Soames's little house is lovely; you don't mean to say you don't think

so!"

"H'mph!" said June, "that's only because Irene's there!"

Aunt Juley tried to say something pleasant:

"And how will dear Irene like living in the country?"

June gazed at her intently, with a look in her eyes as if her conscience

had suddenly leaped up into them; it passed; and an even more intent

look took its place, as if she had stared that conscience out of

countenance. She replied imperiously:

"Of course she'll like it; why shouldn't she?"

Mrs. Small grew nervous.

"I didn't know," she said; "I thought she mightn't like to leave her

friends. Your Uncle James says she doesn't take enough interest in life.

We think--I mean Timothy thinks--she ought to go out more. I expect

you'll miss her very much!"

June clasped her hands behind her neck.

"I do wish," she cried, "Uncle Timothy wouldn't talk about what doesn't

concern him!"

Aunt Juley rose to the full height of her tall figure.

"He never talks about what doesn't concern him," she said.

June was instantly compunctious; she ran to her aunt and kissed her.

"I'm very sorry, auntie; but I wish they'd let Irene alone."

Aunt Juley, unable to think of anything further on the subject that

would be suitable, was silent; she prepared for departure, hooking her

black silk cape across her chest, and, taking up her green reticule:

"And how is your dear grandfather?" she asked in the hall, "I expect

he's very lonely now that all your time is taken up with Mr. Bosinney."

She bent and kissed her niece hungrily, and with little, mincing steps

passed away.

The tears sprang up in June's eyes; running into the little study,

where Bosinney was sitting at the table drawing birds on the back of an

envelope, she sank down by his side and cried:

"Oh, Phil! it's all so horrid!" Her heart was as warm as the colour of

her hair.

On the following Sunday morning, while Soames was shaving, a message was

brought him to the effect that Mr. Bosinney was below, and would be glad

to see him. Opening the door into his wife's room, he said:

"Bosinney's downstairs. Just go and entertain him while I finish

shaving. I'll be down in a minute. It's about the plans, I expect."

Irene looked at him, without reply, put the finishing touch to her dress

and went downstairs. He could not make her out about this house. She had

said nothing against it, and, as far as Bosinney was concerned, seemed

friendly enough.

From the window of his dressing-room he could see them talking together

in the little court below. He hurried on with his shaving, cutting his

chin twice. He heard them laugh, and thought to himself: "Well, they get

on all right, anyway!"

As he expected, Bosinney had come round to fetch him to look at the

plans.

He took his hat and went over.

The plans were spread on the oak table in the architect's room; and

pale, imperturbable, inquiring, Soames bent over them for a long time

without speaking.

He said at last in a puzzled voice:

"It's an odd sort of house!"

A rectangular house of two stories was designed in a quadrangle round a

covered-in court. This court, encircled by a gallery on the upper floor,

was roofed with a glass roof, supported by eight columns running up from

the ground.

It was indeed, to Forsyte eyes, an odd house.

"There's a lot of room cut to waste," pursued Soames.

Bosinney began to walk about, and Soames did not like the expression on

his face.

"The principle of this house," said the architect, "was that you should

have room to breathe--like a gentleman!"

Soames extended his finger and thumb, as if measuring the extent of the

distinction he should acquire; and replied:

"Oh! yes; I see."

The peculiar look came into Bosinney's face which marked all his

enthusiasms.

"I've tried to plan you a house here with some self-respect of its own.

If you don't like it, you'd better say so. It's certainly the last

thing to be considered--who wants self-respect in a house, when you can

squeeze in an extra lavatory?" He put his finger suddenly down on the

left division of the centre oblong: "You can swing a cat here. This is

for your pictures, divided from this court by curtains; draw them

back and you'll have a space of fifty-one by twenty-three six. This

double-faced stove in the centre, here, looks one way towards the court,

one way towards the picture room; this end wall is all window; You've

a southeast light from that, a north light from the court. The rest of

your pictures you can hang round the gallery upstairs, or in the other

rooms." "In architecture," he went on--and though looking at Soames he

did not seem to see him, which gave Soames an unpleasant feeling--"as

in life, you'll get no self-respect without regularity. Fellows tell you

that's old fashioned. It appears to be peculiar any way; it never occurs

to us to embody the main principle of life in our buildings; we load

our houses with decoration, gimcracks, corners, anything to distract the

eye. On the contrary the eye should rest; get your effects with a few

strong lines. The whole thing is regularity there's no self-respect

without it."

Soames, the unconscious ironist, fixed his gaze on Bosinney's tie, which

was far from being in the perpendicular; he was unshaven too, and his

dress not remarkable for order. Architecture appeared to have exhausted

his regularity.

"Won't it look like a barrack?" he inquired.

He did not at once receive a reply.

"I can see what it is," said Bosinney, "you want one of Littlemaster's

houses--one of the pretty and commodious sort, where the servants will

live in garrets, and the front door be sunk so that you may come up

again. By all means try Littlemaster, you'll find him a capital fellow,

I've known him all my life!"

Soames was alarmed. He had really been struck by the plans, and the

concealment of his satisfaction had been merely instinctive. It was

difficult for him to pay a compliment. He despised people who were

lavish with their praises.

He found himself now in the embarrassing position of one who must pay a

compliment or run the risk of losing a good thing. Bosinney was just the

fellow who might tear up the plans and refuse to act for him; a kind of

grown-up child!

This grown-up childishness, to which he felt so superior, exercised a

peculiar and almost mesmeric effect on Soames, for he had never felt

anything like it in himself.

"Well," he stammered at last, "it's--it's, certainly original."

He had such a private distrust and even dislike of the word 'original'

that he felt he had not really given himself away by this remark.

Bosinney seemed pleased. It was the sort of thing that would please a

fellow like that! And his success encouraged Soames.

"It's--a big place," he said.

"Space, air, light," he heard Bosinney murmur, "you can't live like a

gentleman in one of Littlemaster's--he builds for manufacturers."

Soames made a deprecating movement; he had been identified with a

gentleman; not for a good deal of money now would he be classed with

manufacturers. But his innate distrust of general principles

revived. What the deuce was the good of talking about regularity and

self-respect? It looked to him as if the house would be cold.

"Irene can't stand the cold!" he said.

"Ah!" said Bosinney sarcastically. "Your wife? She doesn't like the

cold? I'll see to that; she shan't be cold. Look here!" he pointed, to

four marks at regular intervals on the walls of the court. "I've given

you hot-water pipes in aluminium casings; you can get them with very

good designs."

Soames looked suspiciously at these marks.

"It's all very well, all this," he said, "but what's it going to cost?"

The architect took a sheet of paper from his pocket:

"The house, of course, should be built entirely of stone, but, as I

thought you wouldn't stand that, I've compromised for a facing. It ought

to have a copper roof, but I've made it green slate. As it is, including

metal work, it'll cost you eight thousand five hundred."

"Eight thousand five hundred?" said Soames. "Why, I gave you an outside

limit of eight!"

"Can't be done for a penny less," replied Bosinney coolly.

"You must take it or leave it!"

It was the only way, probably, that such a proposition could have been

made to Soames. He was nonplussed. Conscience told him to throw the

whole thing up. But the design was good, and he knew it--there was

completeness about it, and dignity; the servants' apartments were

excellent too. He would gain credit by living in a house like that--with

such individual features, yet perfectly well-arranged.

He continued poring over the plans, while Bosinney went into his bedroom

to shave and dress.

The two walked back to Montpellier Square in silence, Soames watching

him out of the corner of his eye.

The Buccaneer was rather a good-looking fellow--so he thought--when he

was properly got up.

Irene was bending over her flowers when the two men came in.

She spoke of sending across the Park to fetch June.

"No, no," said Soames, "we've still got business to talk over!"

At lunch he was almost cordial, and kept pressing Bosinney to eat. He

was pleased to see the architect in such high spirits, and left him

to spend the afternoon with Irene, while he stole off to his pictures,

after his Sunday habit. At tea-time he came down to the drawing-room,

and found them talking, as he expressed it, nineteen to the dozen.

Unobserved in the doorway, he congratulated himself that things were

taking the right turn. It was lucky she and Bosinney got on; she seemed

to be falling into line with the idea of the new house.

Quiet meditation among his pictures had decided him to spring the

five hundred if necessary; but he hoped that the afternoon might have

softened Bosinney's estimates. It was so purely a matter which Bosinney

could remedy if he liked; there must be a dozen ways in which he could

cheapen the production of a house without spoiling the effect.

He awaited, therefore, his opportunity till Irene was handing the

architect his first cup of tea. A chink of sunshine through the lace of

the blinds warmed her cheek, shone in the gold of her hair, and in her

soft eyes. Possibly the same gleam deepened Bosinney's colour, gave the

rather startled look to his face.

Soames hated sunshine, and he at once got up, to draw the blind. Then he

took his own cup of tea from his wife, and said, more coldly than he had

intended:

"Can't you see your way to do it for eight thousand after all? There

must be a lot of little things you could alter."

Bosinney drank off his tea at a gulp, put down his cup, and answered:

"Not one!"

Soames saw that his suggestion had touched some unintelligible point of

personal vanity.

"Well," he agreed, with sulky resignation; "you must have it your own

way, I suppose."

A few minutes later Bosinney rose to go, and Soames rose too, to see him

off the premises. The architect seemed in absurdly high spirits. After

watching him walk away at a swinging pace, Soames returned moodily to

the drawing-room, where Irene was putting away the music, and, moved by

an uncontrollable spasm of curiosity, he asked:

"Well, what do you think of 'The Buccaneer'?"

He looked at the carpet while waiting for her answer, and he had to wait

some time.

"I don't know," she said at last.

"Do you think he's good-looking?"

Irene smiled. And it seemed to Soames that she was mocking him.

"Yes," she answered; "very."

CHAPTER IX--DEATH OF AUNT ANN

There came a morning at the end of September when Aunt Ann was unable

to take from Smither's hands the insignia of personal dignity. After

one look at the old face, the doctor, hurriedly sent for, announced that

Miss Forsyte had passed away in her sleep.

Aunts Juley and Hester were overwhelmed by the shock. They had never

imagined such an ending. Indeed, it is doubtful whether they had

ever realized that an ending was bound to come. Secretly they felt it

unreasonable of Ann to have left them like this without a word, without

even a struggle. It was unlike her.

Perhaps what really affected them so profoundly was the thought that a

Forsyte should have let go her grasp on life. If one, then why not all!

It was a full hour before they could make up their minds to tell

Timothy. If only it could be kept from him! If only it could be broken

to him by degrees!

And long they stood outside his door whispering together. And when it

was over they whispered together again.

He would feel it more, they were afraid, as time went on. Still, he had

taken it better than could have been expected. He would keep his bed, of

course!

They separated, crying quietly.

Aunt Juley stayed in her room, prostrated by the blow. Her face,

discoloured by tears, was divided into compartments by the little ridges

of pouting flesh which had swollen with emotion. It was impossible to

conceive of life without Ann, who had lived with her for seventy-three

years, broken only by the short interregnum of her married life, which

seemed now so unreal. At fixed intervals she went to her drawer, and

took from beneath the lavender bags a fresh pocket-handkerchief. Her

warm heart could not bear the thought that Ann was lying there so cold.

Aunt Hester, the silent, the patient, that backwater of the family

energy, sat in the drawing-room, where the blinds were drawn; and she,

too, had wept at first, but quietly, without visible effect. Her guiding

principle, the conservation of energy, did not abandon her in sorrow.

She sat, slim, motionless, studying the grate, her hands idle in the

lap of her black silk dress. They would want to rouse her into doing

something, no doubt. As if there were any good in that! Doing something

would not bring back Ann! Why worry her?

Five o'clock brought three of the brothers, Jolyon and James and

Swithin; Nicholas was at Yarmouth, and Roger had a bad attack of gout.

Mrs. Hayman had been by herself earlier in the day, and, after seeing

Ann, had gone away, leaving a message for Timothy--which was kept from

him--that she ought to have been told sooner. In fact, there was a

feeling amongst them all that they ought to have been told sooner, as

though they had missed something; and James said:

"I knew how it'd be; I told you she wouldn't last through the summer."

Aunt Hester made no reply; it was nearly October, but what was the good

of arguing; some people were never satisfied.

She sent up to tell her sister that the brothers were there. Mrs. Small

came down at once. She had bathed her face, which was still swollen, and

though she looked severely at Swithin's trousers, for they were of light

blue--he had come straight from the club, where the news had reached

him--she wore a more cheerful expression than usual, the instinct for

doing the wrong thing being even now too strong for her.

Presently all five went up to look at the body. Under the pure white

sheet a quilted counter-pane had been placed, for now, more than ever,

Aunt Ann had need of warmth; and, the pillows removed, her spine and

head rested flat, with the semblance of their life-long inflexibility;

the coif banding the top of her brow was drawn on either side to the

level of the ears, and between it and the sheet her face, almost as

white, was turned with closed eyes to the faces of her brothers and

sisters. In its extraordinary peace the face was stronger than ever,

nearly all bone now under the scarce-wrinkled parchment of skin--square

jaw and chin, cheekbones, forehead with hollow temples, chiselled

nose--the fortress of an unconquerable spirit that had yielded to death,

and in its upward sightlessness seemed trying to regain that spirit, to

regain the guardianship it had just laid down.

Swithin took but one look at the face, and left the room; the sight,

he said afterwards, made him very queer. He went downstairs shaking the

whole house, and, seizing his hat, clambered into his brougham, without

giving any directions to the coachman. He was driven home, and all the

evening sat in his chair without moving.

He could take nothing for dinner but a partridge, with an imperial pint

of champagne....

Old Jolyon stood at the bottom of the bed, his hands folded in front of

him. He alone of those in the room remembered the death of his mother,

and though he looked at Ann, it was of that he was thinking. Ann was

an old woman, but death had come to her at last--death came to all! His

face did not move, his gaze seemed travelling from very far.

Aunt Hester stood beside him. She did not cry now, tears were

exhausted--her nature refused to permit a further escape of force; she

twisted her hands, looking not at Ann, but from side to side, seeking

some way of escaping the effort of realization.

Of all the brothers and sisters James manifested the most emotion. Tears

rolled down the parallel furrows of his thin face; where he should go

now to tell his troubles he did not know; Juley was no good, Hester

worse than useless! He felt Ann's death more than he had ever thought he

should; this would upset him for weeks!

Presently Aunt Hester stole out, and Aunt Juley began moving about,

doing 'what was necessary,' so that twice she knocked against something.

Old Jolyon, roused from his reverie, that reverie of the long, long

past, looked sternly at her, and went away. James alone was left by the

bedside; glancing stealthily round, to see that he was not observed, he

twisted his long body down, placed a kiss on the dead forehead, then he,

too, hastily left the room. Encountering Smither in the hall, he began

to ask her about the funeral, and, finding that she knew nothing,

complained bitterly that, if they didn't take care, everything would go

wrong. She had better send for Mr. Soames--he knew all about that sort

of thing; her master was very much upset, he supposed--he would want

looking after; as for her mistresses, they were no good--they had no

gumption! They would be ill too, he shouldn't wonder. She had better

send for the doctor; it was best to take things in time. He didn't think

his sister Ann had had the best opinion; if she'd had Blank she would

have been alive now. Smither might send to Park Lane any time she wanted

advice. Of course, his carriage was at their service for the funeral. He

supposed she hadn't such a thing as a glass of claret and a biscuit--he

had had no lunch!

The days before the funeral passed quietly. It had long been known, of

course, that Aunt Ann had left her little property to Timothy. There

was, therefore, no reason for the slightest agitation. Soames, who was

sole executor, took charge of all arrangements, and in due course sent

out the following invitation to every male member of the family:

To...........

Your presence is requested at the funeral of Miss Ann Forsyte, in

Highgate Cemetery, at noon of Oct. 1st. Carriages will meet at "The

Bower," Bayswater Road, at 10.45. No flowers by request. 'R.S.V.P.'

The morning came, cold, with a high, grey, London sky, and at half-past

ten the first carriage, that of James, drove up. It contained James and

his son-in-law Dartie, a fine man, with a square chest, buttoned very

tightly into a frock coat, and a sallow, fattish face adorned with dark,

well-curled moustaches, and that incorrigible commencement of whisker

which, eluding the strictest attempts at shaving, seems the mark of

something deeply ingrained in the personality of the shaver, being

especially noticeable in men who speculate.

Soames, in his capacity of executor, received the guests, for Timothy

still kept his bed; he would get up after the funeral; and Aunts Juley

and Hester would not be coming down till all was over, when it was

understood there would be lunch for anyone who cared to come back. The

next to arrive was Roger, still limping from the gout, and encircled

by three of his sons--young Roger, Eustace, and Thomas. George, the

remaining son, arrived almost immediately afterwards in a hansom, and

paused in the hall to ask Soames how he found undertaking pay.

They disliked each other.

Then came two Haymans--Giles and Jesse perfectly silent, and very well

dressed, with special creases down their evening trousers. Then old

Jolyon alone. Next, Nicholas, with a healthy colour in his face, and a

carefully veiled sprightliness in every movement of his head and body.

One of his sons followed him, meek and subdued. Swithin Forsyte, and

Bosinney arrived at the same moment,--and stood--bowing precedence to

each other,--but on the door opening they tried to enter together; they

renewed their apologies in the hall, and, Swithin, settling his stock,

which had become disarranged in the struggle, very slowly mounted the

stairs. The other Hayman; two married sons of Nicholas, together with

Tweetyman, Spender, and Warry, the husbands of married Forsyte and

Hayman daughters. The company was then complete, twenty-one in all, not

a male member of the family being absent but Timothy and young Jolyon.

Entering the scarlet and green drawing-room, whose apparel made so vivid

a setting for their unaccustomed costumes, each tried nervously to find

a seat, desirous of hiding the emphatic blackness of his trousers. There

seemed a sort of indecency in that blackness and in the colour of their

gloves--a sort of exaggeration of the feelings; and many cast shocked

looks of secret envy at 'the Buccaneer,' who had no gloves, and was

wearing grey trousers. A subdued hum of conversation rose, no one

speaking of the departed, but each asking after the other, as though

thereby casting an indirect libation to this event, which they had come

to honour.

And presently James said:

"Well, I think we ought to be starting."

They went downstairs, and, two and two, as they had been told off in

strict precedence, mounted the carriages.

The hearse started at a foot's pace; the carriages moved slowly after.

In the first went old Jolyon with Nicholas; in the second, the twins,

Swithin and James; in the third, Roger and young Roger; Soames, young

Nicholas, George, and Bosinney followed in the fourth. Each of the other

carriages, eight in all, held three or four of the family; behind them

came the doctor's brougham; then, at a decent interval, cabs containing

family clerks and servants; and at the very end, one containing nobody

at all, but bringing the total cortege up to the number of thirteen.

So long as the procession kept to the highway of the Bayswater Road,

it retained the foot's-pace, but, turning into less important

thorough-fares, it soon broke into a trot, and so proceeded, with

intervals of walking in the more fashionable streets, until it arrived.

In the first carriage old Jolyon and Nicholas were talking of their

wills. In the second the twins, after a single attempt, had lapsed into

complete silence; both were rather deaf, and the exertion of making

themselves heard was too great. Only once James broke this silence:

"I shall have to be looking about for some ground somewhere. What

arrangements have you made, Swithin?"

And Swithin, fixing him with a dreadful stare, answered:

"Don't talk to me about such things!"

In the third carriage a disjointed conversation was carried on in the

intervals of looking out to see how far they had got, George remarking,

"Well, it was really time that the poor old lady went." He didn't

believe in people living beyond seventy, Young Nicholas replied mildly

that the rule didn't seem to apply to the Forsytes. George said he

himself intended to commit suicide at sixty. Young Nicholas, smiling and

stroking a long chin, didn't think his father would like that theory;

he had made a lot of money since he was sixty. Well, seventy was the

outside limit; it was then time, George said, for them to go and leave

their money to their children. Soames, hitherto silent, here joined in;

he had not forgotten the remark about the 'undertaking,' and, lifting

his eyelids almost imperceptibly, said it was all very well for people

who never made money to talk. He himself intended to live as long as he

could. This was a hit at George, who was notoriously hard up.

Bosinney muttered abstractedly "Hear, hear!" and, George yawning, the

conversation dropped.

Upon arriving, the coffin was borne into the chapel, and, two by two,

the mourners filed in behind it. This guard of men, all attached to the

dead by the bond of kinship, was an impressive and singular sight in

the great city of London, with its overwhelming diversity of life, its

innumerable vocations, pleasures, duties, its terrible hardness, its

terrible call to individualism.

The family had gathered to triumph over all this, to give a show

of tenacious unity, to illustrate gloriously that law of property

underlying the growth of their tree, by which it had thriven and spread,

trunk and branches, the sap flowing through all, the full growth reached

at the appointed time. The spirit of the old woman lying in her last

sleep had called them to this demonstration. It was her final appeal to

that unity which had been their strength--it was her final triumph that

she had died while the tree was yet whole.

She was spared the watching of the branches jut out beyond the point of

balance. She could not look into the hearts of her followers. The same

law that had worked in her, bringing her up from a tall, straight-backed

slip of a girl to a woman strong and grown, from a woman grown to a

woman old, angular, feeble, almost witchlike, with individuality all

sharpened and sharpened, as all rounding from the world's contact fell

off from her--that same law would work, was working, in the family she

had watched like a mother.

She had seen it young, and growing, she had seen it strong and grown,

and before her old eyes had time or strength to see any more, she died.

She would have tried, and who knows but she might have kept it young

and strong, with her old fingers, her trembling kisses--a little longer;

alas! not even Aunt Ann could fight with Nature.

'Pride comes before a fall!' In accordance with this, the greatest

of Nature's ironies, the Forsyte family had gathered for a last proud

pageant before they fell. Their faces to right and left, in single

lines, were turned for the most part impassively toward the ground,

guardians of their thoughts; but here and there, one looking upward,

with a line between his brows, searched to see some sight on the chapel

walls too much for him, to be listening to something that appalled. And

the responses, low-muttered, in voices through which rose the same tone,

the same unseizable family ring, sounded weird, as though murmured in

hurried duplication by a single person.

The service in the chapel over, the mourners filed up again to guard the

body to the tomb. The vault stood open, and, round it, men in black were

waiting.

From that high and sacred field, where thousands of the upper middle

class lay in their last sleep, the eyes of the Forsytes travelled down

across the flocks of graves. There--spreading to the distance, lay

London, with no sun over it, mourning the loss of its daughter, mourning

with this family, so dear, the loss of her who was mother and guardian.

A hundred thousand spires and houses, blurred in the great grey web of

property, lay there like prostrate worshippers before the grave of this,

the oldest Forsyte of them all.

A few words, a sprinkle of earth, the thrusting of the coffin home, and

Aunt Ann had passed to her last rest.

Round the vault, trustees of that passing, the five brothers stood, with

white heads bowed; they would see that Ann was comfortable where she

was going. Her little property must stay behind, but otherwise, all that

could be should be done....

Then severally, each stood aside, and putting on his hat, turned back to

inspect the new inscription on the marble of the family vault:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF ANN FORSYTE,

THE DAUGHTER OF THE ABOVE JOLYON AND ANN FORSYTE,

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE THE 27TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 1886,

AGED EIGHTY-SEVEN YEARS AND FOUR DAYS

Soon perhaps, someone else would be wanting an inscription. It was

strange and intolerable, for they had not thought somehow, that Forsytes

could die. And one and all they had a longing to get away from this

painfulness, this ceremony which had reminded them of things they could

not bear to think about--to get away quickly and go about their business

and forget.

It was cold, too; the wind, like some slow, disintegrating force,

blowing up the hill over the graves, struck them with its chilly breath;

they began to split into groups, and as quickly as possible to fill the

waiting carriages.

Swithin said he should go back to lunch at Timothy's, and he offered

to take anybody with him in his brougham. It was considered a doubtful

privilege to drive with Swithin in his brougham, which was not a large

one; nobody accepted, and he went off alone. James and Roger followed

immediately after; they also would drop in to lunch. The others

gradually melted away, Old Jolyon taking three nephews to fill up his

carriage; he had a want of those young faces.

Soames, who had to arrange some details in the cemetery office, walked

away with Bosinney. He had much to talk over with him, and, having

finished his business, they strolled to Hampstead, lunched together

at the Spaniard's Inn, and spent a long time in going into practical

details connected with the building of the house; they then proceeded to

the tram-line, and came as far as the Marble Arch, where Bosinney went

off to Stanhope Gate to see June.

Soames felt in excellent spirits when he arrived home, and confided to

Irene at dinner that he had had a good talk with Bosinney, who really

seemed a sensible fellow; they had had a capital walk too, which had

done his liver good--he had been short of exercise for a long time--and

altogether a very satisfactory day. If only it hadn't been for poor Aunt

Ann, he would have taken her to the theatre; as it was, they must make

the best of an evening at home.

"The Buccaneer asked after you more than once," he said suddenly. And

moved by some inexplicable desire to assert his proprietorship, he rose

from his chair and planted a kiss on his wife's shoulder.

PART II

CHAPTER I--PROGRESS OF THE HOUSE

The winter had been an open one. Things in the trade were slack; and as

Soames had reflected before making up his mind, it had been a good time

for building. The shell of the house at Robin Hill was thus completed by

the end of April.

Now that there was something to be seen for his money, he had been

coming down once, twice, even three times a week, and would mouse about

among the debris for hours, careful never to soil his clothes, moving

silently through the unfinished brickwork of doorways, or circling round

the columns in the central court.

And he would stand before them for minutes' together, as though peering

into the real quality of their substance.

On April 30 he had an appointment with Bosinney to go over the accounts,

and five minutes before the proper time he entered the tent which the

architect had pitched for himself close to the old oak tree.

The accounts were already prepared on a folding table, and with a nod

Soames sat down to study them. It was some time before he raised his

head.

"I can't make them out," he said at last; "they come to nearly seven

hundred more than they ought."

After a glance at Bosinney's face he went on quickly:

"If you only make a firm stand against these builder chaps you'll get

them down. They stick you with everything if you don't look sharp....

Take ten per cent. off all round. I shan't mind it's coming out a

hundred or so over the mark!"

Bosinney shook his head:

"I've taken off every farthing I can!"

Soames pushed back the table with a movement of anger, which sent the

account sheets fluttering to the ground.

"Then all I can say is," he flustered out, "you've made a pretty mess of

it!"

"I've told you a dozen times," Bosinney answered sharply, "that there'd

be extras. I've pointed them out to you over and over again!"

"I know that," growled Soames: "I shouldn't have objected to a ten pound

note here and there. How was I to know that by 'extras' you meant seven

hundred pounds?"

The qualities of both men had contributed to this not-inconsiderable

discrepancy. On the one hand, the architect's devotion to his idea, to

the image of a house which he had created and believed in--had made him

nervous of being stopped, or forced to the use of makeshifts; on the

other, Soames' not less true and wholehearted devotion to the very best

article that could be obtained for the money, had rendered him averse to

believing that things worth thirteen shillings could not be bought with

twelve.

"I wish I'd never undertaken your house," said Bosinney suddenly. "You

come down here worrying me out of my life. You want double the value for

your money anybody else would, and now that you've got a house that for

its size is not to be beaten in the county, you don't want to pay for

it. If you're anxious to be off your bargain, I daresay I can find

the balance above the estimates myself, but I'm d----d if I do another

stroke of work for you!"

Soames regained his composure. Knowing that Bosinney had no capital, he

regarded this as a wild suggestion. He saw, too, that he would be kept

indefinitely out of this house on which he had set his heart, and just

at the crucial point when the architect's personal care made all the

difference. In the meantime there was Irene to be thought of! She had

been very queer lately. He really believed it was only because she had

taken to Bosinney that she tolerated the idea of the house at all. It

would not do to make an open breach with her.

"You needn't get into a rage," he said. "If I'm willing to put up with

it, I suppose you needn't cry out. All I meant was that when you tell me

a thing is going to cost so much, I like to--well, in fact, I--like to

know where I am."

"Look here!" said Bosinney, and Soames was both annoyed and surprised

by the shrewdness of his glance. "You've got my services dirt cheap. For

the kind of work I've put into this house, and the amount of time I've

given to it, you'd have had to pay Littlemaster or some other fool

four times as much. What you want, in fact, is a first-rate man for a

fourth-rate fee, and that's exactly what you've got!"

Soames saw that he really meant what he said, and, angry though he was,

the consequences of a row rose before him too vividly. He saw his house

unfinished, his wife rebellious, himself a laughingstock.

"Let's go over it," he said sulkily, "and see how the money's gone."

"Very well," assented Bosinney. "But we'll hurry up, if you don't mind.

I have to get back in time to take June to the theatre."

Soames cast a stealthy look at him, and said: "Coming to our place, I

suppose to meet her?" He was always coming to their place!

There had been rain the night before-a spring rain, and the earth smelt

of sap and wild grasses. The warm, soft breeze swung the leaves and the

golden buds of the old oak tree, and in the sunshine the blackbirds were

whistling their hearts out.

It was such a spring day as breathes into a man an ineffable yearning, a

painful sweetness, a longing that makes him stand motionless, looking

at the leaves or grass, and fling out his arms to embrace he knows not

what. The earth gave forth a fainting warmth, stealing up through the

chilly garment in which winter had wrapped her. It was her long caress

of invitation, to draw men down to lie within her arms, to roll their

bodies on her, and put their lips to her breast.

On just such a day as this Soames had got from Irene the promise he had

asked her for so often. Seated on the fallen trunk of a tree, he had

promised for the twentieth time that if their marriage were not a

success, she should be as free as if she had never married him!

"Do you swear it?" she had said. A few days back she had reminded him

of that oath. He had answered: "Nonsense! I couldn't have sworn any such

thing!" By some awkward fatality he remembered it now. What queer things

men would swear for the sake of women! He would have sworn it at any

time to gain her! He would swear it now, if thereby he could touch

her--but nobody could touch her, she was cold-hearted!

And memories crowded on him with the fresh, sweet savour of the spring

wind-memories of his courtship.

In the spring of the year 1881 he was visiting his old school-fellow

and client, George Liversedge, of Branksome, who, with the view of

developing his pine-woods in the neighbourhood of Bournemouth, had

placed the formation of the company necessary to the scheme in Soames's

hands. Mrs. Liversedge, with a sense of the fitness of things, had given

a musical tea in his honour. Later in the course of this function, which

Soames, no musician, had regarded as an unmitigated bore, his eye had

been caught by the face of a girl dressed in mourning, standing by

herself. The lines of her tall, as yet rather thin figure, showed

through the wispy, clinging stuff of her black dress, her black-gloved

hands were crossed in front of her, her lips slightly parted, and her

large, dark eyes wandered from face to face. Her hair, done low on

her neck, seemed to gleam above her black collar like coils of shining

metal. And as Soames stood looking at her, the sensation that most men

have felt at one time or another went stealing through him--a peculiar

satisfaction of the senses, a peculiar certainty, which novelists and

old ladies call love at first sight. Still stealthily watching her, he

at once made his way to his hostess, and stood doggedly waiting for the

music to cease.

"Who is that girl with yellow hair and dark eyes?" he asked.

"That--oh! Irene Heron. Her father, Professor Heron, died this year.

She lives with her stepmother. She's a nice girl, a pretty girl, but no

money!"

"Introduce me, please," said Soames.

It was very little that he found to say, nor did he find her responsive

to that little. But he went away with the resolution to see her again.

He effected his object by chance, meeting her on the pier with her

stepmother, who had the habit of walking there from twelve to one of a

forenoon. Soames made this lady's acquaintance with alacrity, nor was

it long before he perceived in her the ally he was looking for. His keen

scent for the commercial side of family life soon told him that Irene

cost her stepmother more than the fifty pounds a year she brought her;

it also told him that Mrs. Heron, a woman yet in the prime of life,

desired to be married again. The strange ripening beauty of her

stepdaughter stood in the way of this desirable consummation. And

Soames, in his stealthy tenacity, laid his plans.

He left Bournemouth without having given himself away, but in a month's

time came back, and this time he spoke, not to the girl, but to her

stepmother. He had made up his mind, he said; he would wait any time.

And he had long to wait, watching Irene bloom, the lines of her young

figure softening, the stronger blood deepening the gleam of her eyes,

and warming her face to a creamy glow; and at each visit he proposed to

her, and when that visit was at an end, took her refusal away with him,

back to London, sore at heart, but steadfast and silent as the grave. He

tried to come at the secret springs of her resistance; only once had he

a gleam of light. It was at one of those assembly dances, which

afford the only outlet to the passions of the population of seaside

watering-places. He was sitting with her in an embrasure, his senses

tingling with the contact of the waltz. She had looked at him over her,

slowly waving fan; and he had lost his head. Seizing that moving wrist,

he pressed his lips to the flesh of her arm. And she had shuddered--to

this day he had not forgotten that shudder--nor the look so passionately

averse she had given him.

A year after that she had yielded. What had made her yield he could

never make out; and from Mrs. Heron, a woman of some diplomatic talent,

he learnt nothing. Once after they were married he asked her, "What

made you refuse me so often?" She had answered by a strange silence. An

enigma to him from the day that he first saw her, she was an enigma to

him still....

Bosinney was waiting for him at the door; and on his rugged,

good-looking, face was a queer, yearning, yet happy look, as though he

too saw a promise of bliss in the spring sky, sniffed a coming happiness

in the spring air. Soames looked at him waiting there. What was the

matter with the fellow that he looked so happy? What was he waiting for

with that smile on his lips and in his eyes? Soames could not see

that for which Bosinney was waiting as he stood there drinking in the

flower-scented wind. And once more he felt baffled in the presence of

this man whom by habit he despised. He hastened on to the house.

"The only colour for those tiles," he heard Bosinney say,--"is ruby with

a grey tint in the stuff, to give a transparent effect. I should like

Irene's opinion. I'm ordering the purple leather curtains for the

doorway of this court; and if you distemper the drawing-room ivory cream

over paper, you'll get an illusive look. You want to aim all through the

decorations at what I call charm."

Soames said: "You mean that my wife has charm!"

Bosinney evaded the question.

"You should have a clump of iris plants in the centre of that court."

Soames smiled superciliously.

"I'll look into Beech's some time," he said, "and see what's

appropriate!"

They found little else to say to each other, but on the way to the

Station Soames asked:

"I suppose you find Irene very artistic."

"Yes." The abrupt answer was as distinct a snub as saying: "If you want

to discuss her you can do it with someone else!"

And the slow, sulky anger Soames had felt all the afternoon burned the

brighter within him.

Neither spoke again till they were close to the Station, then Soames

asked:

"When do you expect to have finished?"

"By the end of June, if you really wish me to decorate as well."

Soames nodded. "But you quite understand," he said, "that the house is

costing me a lot beyond what I contemplated. I may as well tell you that

I should have thrown it up, only I'm not in the habit of giving up what

I've set my mind on."

Bosinney made no reply. And Soames gave him askance a look of dogged

dislike--for in spite of his fastidious air and that supercilious,

dandified taciturnity, Soames, with his set lips and squared chin, was

not unlike a bulldog....

When, at seven o'clock that evening, June arrived at 62, Montpellier

Square, the maid Bilson told her that Mr. Bosinney was in the

drawing-room; the mistress--she said--was dressing, and would be down in

a minute. She would tell her that Miss June was here.

June stopped her at once.

"All right, Bilson," she said, "I'll just go in. You, needn't hurry Mrs.

Soames."

She took off her cloak, and Bilson, with an understanding look, did not

even open the drawing-room door for her, but ran downstairs.

June paused for a moment to look at herself in the little old-fashioned

silver mirror above the oaken rug chest--a slim, imperious young figure,

with a small resolute face, in a white frock, cut moon-shaped at the

base of a neck too slender for her crown of twisted red-gold hair.

She opened the drawing-room door softly, meaning to take him by

surprise. The room was filled with a sweet hot scent of flowering

azaleas.

She took a long breath of the perfume, and heard Bosinney's voice, not

in the room, but quite close, saying.

"Ah! there were such heaps of things I wanted to talk about, and now we

shan't have time!"

Irene's voice answered: "Why not at dinner?"

"How can one talk...."

June's first thought was to go away, but instead she crossed to the long

window opening on the little court. It was from there that the scent

of the azaleas came, and, standing with their backs to her, their faces

buried in the golden-pink blossoms, stood her lover and Irene.

Silent but unashamed, with flaming cheeks and angry eyes, the girl

watched.

"Come on Sunday by yourself--We can go over the house together."

June saw Irene look up at him through her screen of blossoms. It was not

the look of a coquette, but--far worse to the watching girl--of a woman

fearful lest that look should say too much.

"I've promised to go for a drive with Uncle...."

"The big one! Make him bring you; it's only ten miles--the very thing

for his horses."

"Poor old Uncle Swithin!"

A wave of the azalea scent drifted into June's face; she felt sick and

dizzy.

"Do! ah! do!"

"But why?"

"I must see you there--I thought you'd like to help me...."

The answer seemed to the girl to come softly with a tremble from amongst

the blossoms: "So I do!"

And she stepped into the open space of the window.

"How stuffy it is here!" she said; "I can't bear this scent!"

Her eyes, so angry and direct, swept both their faces.

"Were you talking about the house? I haven't seen it yet, you

know--shall we all go on Sunday?"'

From Irene's face the colour had flown.

"I am going for a drive that day with Uncle Swithin," she answered.

"Uncle Swithin! What does he matter? You can throw him over!"

"I am not in the habit of throwing people over!"

There was a sound of footsteps and June saw Soames standing just behind

her.

"Well! if you are all ready," said Irene, looking from one to the other

with a strange smile, "dinner is too!"

CHAPTER II--JUNE'S TREAT

Dinner began in silence; the women facing one another, and the men.

In silence the soup was finished--excellent, if a little thick; and fish

was brought. In silence it was handed.

Bosinney ventured: "It's the first spring day."

Irene echoed softly: "Yes--the first spring day."

"Spring!" said June: "there isn't a breath of air!" No one replied.

The fish was taken away, a fine fresh sole from Dover. And Bilson

brought champagne, a bottle swathed around the neck with white....

Soames said: "You'll find it dry."

Cutlets were handed, each pink-frilled about the legs. They were refused

by June, and silence fell.

Soames said: "You'd better take a cutlet, June; there's nothing coming."

But June again refused, so they were borne away. And then Irene asked:

"Phil, have you heard my blackbird?"

Bosinney answered: "Rather--he's got a hunting-song. As I came round I

heard him in the Square."

"He's such a darling!"

"Salad, sir?" Spring chicken was removed.

But Soames was speaking: "The asparagus is very poor. Bosinney, glass of

sherry with your sweet? June, you're drinking nothing!"

June said: "You know I never do. Wine's such horrid stuff!"

An apple charlotte came upon a silver dish, and smilingly Irene said:

"The azaleas are so wonderful this year!"

To this Bosinney murmured: "Wonderful! The scent's extraordinary!"

June said: "How can you like the scent? Sugar, please, Bilson."

Sugar was handed her, and Soames remarked: "This charlottes good!"

The charlotte was removed. Long silence followed. Irene, beckoning,

said: "Take out the azalea, Bilson. Miss June can't bear the scent."

"No; let it stay," said June.

Olives from France, with Russian caviare, were placed on little plates.

And Soames remarked: "Why can't we have the Spanish?" But no one

answered.

The olives were removed. Lifting her tumbler June demanded: "Give me

some water, please." Water was given her. A silver tray was brought,

with German plums. There was a lengthy pause. In perfect harmony all

were eating them.

Bosinney counted up the stones: "This year--next year--some time."

Irene finished softly: "Never! There was such a glorious sunset. The

sky's all ruby still--so beautiful!"

He answered: "Underneath the dark."

Their eyes had met, and June cried scornfully: "A London sunset!"

Egyptian cigarettes were handed in a silver box. Soames, taking one,

remarked: "What time's your play begin?"

No one replied, and Turkish coffee followed in enamelled cups.

Irene, smiling quietly, said: "If only...."

"Only what?" said June.

"If only it could always be the spring!"

Brandy was handed; it was pale and old.

Soames said: "Bosinney, better take some brandy."

Bosinney took a glass; they all arose.

"You want a cab?" asked Soames.

June answered: "No! My cloaks please, Bilson." Her cloak was brought.

Irene, from the window, murmured: "Such a lovely night! The stars are

coming out!"

Soames added: "Well, I hope you'll both enjoy yourselves."

From the door June answered: "Thanks. Come, Phil."

Bosinney cried: "I'm coming."

Soames smiled a sneering smile, and said: "I wish you luck!"

And at the door Irene watched them go.

Bosinney called: "Good night!"

"Good night!" she answered softly....

June made her lover take her on the top of a 'bus, saying she wanted

air, and there sat silent, with her face to the breeze.

The driver turned once or twice, with the intention of venturing a

remark, but thought better of it. They were a lively couple! The spring

had got into his blood, too; he felt the need for letting steam escape,

and clucked his tongue, flourishing his whip, wheeling his horses,

and even they, poor things, had smelled the spring, and for a brief

half-hour spurned the pavement with happy hoofs.

The whole town was alive; the boughs, curled upward with their decking

of young leaves, awaited some gift the breeze could bring. New-lighted

lamps were gaining mastery, and the faces of the crowd showed pale under

that glare, while on high the great white clouds slid swiftly, softly,

over the purple sky.

Men in, evening dress had thrown back overcoats, stepping jauntily up

the steps of Clubs; working folk loitered; and women--those women who

at that time of night are solitary--solitary and moving eastward in a

stream--swung slowly along, with expectation in their gait, dreaming of

good wine and a good supper, or--for an unwonted minute, of kisses given

for love.

Those countless figures, going their ways under the lamps and the

moving-sky, had one and all received some restless blessing from the

stir of spring. And one and all, like those clubmen with their opened

coats, had shed something of caste, and creed, and custom, and by the

cock of their hats, the pace of their walk, their laughter, or their

silence, revealed their common kinship under the passionate heavens.

Bosinney and June entered the theatre in silence, and mounted to

their seats in the upper boxes. The piece had just begun, and the

half-darkened house, with its rows of creatures peering all one way,

resembled a great garden of flowers turning their faces to the sun.

June had never before been in the upper boxes. From the age of fifteen

she had habitually accompanied her grandfather to the stalls, and not

common stalls, but the best seats in the house, towards the centre of

the third row, booked by old Jolyon, at Grogan and Boyne's, on his way

home from the City, long before the day; carried in his overcoat pocket,

together with his cigar-case and his old kid gloves, and handed to June

to keep till the appointed night. And in those stalls--an erect old

figure with a serene white head, a little figure, strenuous and eager,

with a red-gold head--they would sit through every kind of play, and on

the way home old Jolyon would say of the principal actor: "Oh, he's a

poor stick! You should have seen little Bobson!"

She had looked forward to this evening with keen delight; it was stolen,

chaperone-less, undreamed of at Stanhope Gate, where she was supposed to

be at Soames'. She had expected reward for her subterfuge, planned for

her lover's sake; she had expected it to break up the thick, chilly

cloud, and make the relations between them which of late had been so

puzzling, so tormenting--sunny and simple again as they had been

before the winter. She had come with the intention of saying something

definite; and she looked at the stage with a furrow between her brows,

seeing nothing, her hands squeezed together in her lap. A swarm of

jealous suspicions stung and stung her.

If Bosinney was conscious of her trouble he made no sign.

The curtain dropped. The first act had come to an end.

"It's awfully hot here!" said the girl; "I should like to go out."

She was very white, and she knew--for with her nerves thus sharpened she

saw everything--that he was both uneasy and compunctious.

At the back of the theatre an open balcony hung over the street; she

took possession of this, and stood leaning there without a word, waiting

for him to begin.

At last she could bear it no longer.

"I want to say something to you, Phil," she said.

"Yes?"

The defensive tone of his voice brought the colour flying to her cheek,

the words flying to her lips: "You don't give me a chance to be nice to

you; you haven't for ages now!"

Bosinney stared down at the street. He made no answer....

June cried passionately: "You know I want to do everything for you--that

I want to be everything to you...."

A hum rose from the street, and, piercing it with a sharp 'ping,'

the bell sounded for the raising of the curtain. June did not stir. A

desperate struggle was going on within her. Should she put everything to

the proof? Should she challenge directly that influence, that attraction

which was driving him away from her? It was her nature to challenge, and

she said: "Phil, take me to see the house on Sunday!"

With a smile quivering and breaking on her lips, and trying, how hard,

not to show that she was watching, she searched his face, saw it waver

and hesitate, saw a troubled line come between his brows, the blood rush

into his face. He answered: "Not Sunday, dear; some other day!"

"Why not Sunday? I shouldn't be in the way on Sunday."

He made an evident effort, and said: "I have an engagement."

"You are going to take...."

His eyes grew angry; he shrugged his shoulders, and answered: "An

engagement that will prevent my taking you to see the house!"

June bit her lip till the blood came, and walked back to her seat

without another word, but she could not help the tears of rage rolling

down her face. The house had been mercifully darkened for a crisis, and

no one could see her trouble.

Yet in this world of Forsytes let no man think himself immune from

observation.

In the third row behind, Euphemia, Nicholas's youngest daughter, with

her married-sister, Mrs. Tweetyman, were watching.

They reported at Timothy's, how they had seen June and her fiance at the

theatre.

"In the stalls?" "No, not in the...." "Oh! in the dress circle, of

course. That seemed to be quite fashionable nowadays with young people!"

Well--not exactly. In the.... Anyway, that engagement wouldn't last

long. They had never seen anyone look so thunder and lightningy as that

little June! With tears of enjoyment in their eyes, they related how she

had kicked a man's hat as she returned to her seat in the middle of an

act, and how the man had looked. Euphemia had a noted, silent laugh,

terminating most disappointingly in squeaks; and when Mrs. Small,

holding up her hands, said: "My dear! Kicked a ha-at?" she let out such

a number of these that she had to be recovered with smelling-salts. As

she went away she said to Mrs. Tweetyman:

"Kicked a--ha-at! Oh! I shall die."

For 'that little June' this evening, that was to have been 'her treat,'

was the most miserable she had ever spent. God knows she tried to stifle

her pride, her suspicion, her jealousy!

She parted from Bosinney at old Jolyon's door without breaking down; the

feeling that her lover must be conquered was strong enough to sustain

her till his retiring footsteps brought home the true extent of her

wretchedness.

The noiseless 'Sankey' let her in. She would have slipped up to her own

room, but old Jolyon, who had heard her entrance, was in the dining-room

doorway.

"Come in and have your milk," he said. "It's been kept hot for you.

You're very late. Where have you been?"

June stood at the fireplace, with a foot on the fender and an arm on the

mantelpiece, as her grandfather had done when he came in that night of

the opera. She was too near a breakdown to care what she told him.

"We dined at Soames's."

"H'm! the man of property! His wife there and Bosinney?"

"Yes."

Old Jolyon's glance was fixed on her with the penetrating gaze from

which it was difficult to hide; but she was not looking at him, and

when she turned her face, he dropped his scrutiny at once. He had seen

enough, and too much. He bent down to lift the cup of milk for her from

the hearth, and, turning away, grumbled: "You oughtn't to stay out so

late; it makes you fit for nothing."

He was invisible now behind his paper, which he turned with a vicious

crackle; but when June came up to kiss him, he said: "Good-night, my

darling," in a tone so tremulous and unexpected, that it was all the

girl could do to get out of the room without breaking into the fit of

sobbing which lasted her well on into the night.

When the door was closed, old Jolyon dropped his paper, and stared long

and anxiously in front of him.

'The beggar!' he thought. 'I always knew she'd have trouble with him!'

Uneasy doubts and suspicions, the more poignant that he felt himself

powerless to check or control the march of events, came crowding upon

him.

Was the fellow going to jilt her? He longed to go and say to him: "Look

here, you sir! Are you going to jilt my grand-daughter?" But how could

he? Knowing little or nothing, he was yet certain, with his unerring

astuteness, that there was something going on. He suspected Bosinney of

being too much at Montpellier Square.

'This fellow,' he thought, 'may not be a scamp; his face is not a bad

one, but he's a queer fish. I don't know what to make of him. I shall

never know what to make of him! They tell me he works like a nigger, but

I see no good coming of it. He's unpractical, he has no method. When he

comes here, he sits as glum as a monkey. If I ask him what wine he'll

have, he says: "Thanks, any wine." If I offer him a cigar, he smokes it

as if it were a twopenny German thing. I never see him looking at June

as he ought to look at her; and yet, he's not after her money. If

she were to make a sign, he'd be off his bargain to-morrow. But she

won't--not she! She'll stick to him! She's as obstinate as fate--She'll

never let go!'

Sighing deeply, he turned the paper; in its columns, perchance he might

find consolation.

And upstairs in her room June sat at her open window, where the spring

wind came, after its revel across the Park, to cool her hot cheeks and

burn her heart.

CHAPTER III--DRIVE WITH SWITHIN

Two lines of a certain song in a certain famous old school's songbook

run as follows:

'How the buttons on his blue frock shone, tra-la-la! How he carolled and

he sang, like a bird!...'

Swithin did not exactly carol and sing like a bird, but he felt

almost like endeavouring to hum a tune, as he stepped out of Hyde Park

Mansions, and contemplated his horses drawn up before the door.

The afternoon was as balmy as a day in June, and to complete the simile

of the old song, he had put on a blue frock-coat, dispensing with an

overcoat, after sending Adolf down three times to make sure that there

was not the least suspicion of east in the wind; and the frock-coat was

buttoned so tightly around his personable form, that, if the buttons did

not shine, they might pardonably have done so. Majestic on the pavement

he fitted on a pair of dog-skin gloves; with his large bell-shaped

top hat, and his great stature and bulk he looked too primeval for a

Forsyte. His thick white hair, on which Adolf had bestowed a touch of

pomatum, exhaled the fragrance of opoponax and cigars--the celebrated

Swithin brand, for which he paid one hundred and forty shillings the

hundred, and of which old Jolyon had unkindly said, he wouldn't smoke

them as a gift; they wanted the stomach of a horse!

"Adolf!"

"Sare!"

"The new plaid rug!"

He would never teach that fellow to look smart; and Mrs. Soames he felt

sure, had an eye!

"The phaeton hood down; I am going--to--drive--a--lady!"

A pretty woman would want to show off her frock; and well--he was going

to drive a lady! It was like a new beginning to the good old days.

Ages since he had driven a woman! The last time, if he remembered, it

had been Juley; the poor old soul had been as nervous as a cat the whole

time, and so put him out of patience that, as he dropped her in the

Bayswater Road, he had said: "Well I'm d---d if I ever drive you again!"

And he never had, not he!

Going up to his horses' heads, he examined their bits; not that he knew

anything about bits--he didn't pay his coachman sixty pounds a year

to do his work for him, that had never been his principle. Indeed, his

reputation as a horsey man rested mainly on the fact that once, on Derby

Day, he had been welshed by some thimble-riggers. But someone at the

Club, after seeing him drive his greys up to the door--he always drove

grey horses, you got more style for the money, some thought--had called

him 'Four-in-hand Forsyte.' The name having reached his ears through

that fellow Nicholas Treffry, old Jolyon's dead partner, the great

driving man notorious for more carriage accidents than any man in the

kingdom--Swithin had ever after conceived it right to act up to it. The

name had taken his fancy, not because he had ever driven four-in-hand,

or was ever likely to, but because of something distinguished in the

sound. Four-in-hand Forsyte! Not bad! Born too soon, Swithin had missed

his vocation. Coming upon London twenty years later, he could not have

failed to have become a stockbroker, but at the time when he was obliged

to select, this great profession had not as yet became the chief glory

of the upper-middle class. He had literally been forced into land

agency.

Once in the driving seat, with the reins handed to him, and blinking

over his pale old cheeks in the full sunlight, he took a slow look

round--Adolf was already up behind; the cockaded groom at the horses'

heads stood ready to let go; everything was prepared for the signal, and

Swithin gave it. The equipage dashed forward, and before you could say

Jack Robinson, with a rattle and flourish drew up at Soames' door.

Irene came out at once, and stepped in--he afterward described it at

Timothy's--"as light as--er--Taglioni, no fuss about it, no wanting this

or wanting that;" and above all, Swithin dwelt on this, staring at

Mrs. Septimus in a way that disconcerted her a good deal, "no silly

nervousness!" To Aunt Hester he portrayed Irene's hat. "Not one of your

great flopping things, sprawling about, and catching the dust, that

women are so fond of nowadays, but a neat little--" he made a circular

motion of his hand, "white veil--capital taste."

"What was it made of?" inquired Aunt Hester, who manifested a languid

but permanent excitement at any mention of dress.

"Made of?" returned Swithin; "now how should I know?"

He sank into silence so profound that Aunt Hester began to be afraid he

had fallen into a trance. She did not try to rouse him herself, it not

being her custom.

'I wish somebody would come,' she thought; 'I don't like the look of

him!'

But suddenly Swithin returned to life. "Made of" he wheezed out slowly,

"what should it be made of?"

They had not gone four miles before Swithin received the impression that

Irene liked driving with him. Her face was so soft behind that white

veil, and her dark eyes shone so in the spring light, and whenever he

spoke she raised them to him and smiled.

On Saturday morning Soames had found her at her writing-table with a

note written to Swithin, putting him off. Why did she want to put him

off? he asked. She might put her own people off when she liked, he would

not have her putting off his people!

She had looked at him intently, had torn up the note, and said: "Very

well!"

And then she began writing another. He took a casual glance presently,

and saw that it was addressed to Bosinney.

"What are you writing to him about?" he asked.

Irene, looking at him again with that intent look, said quietly:

"Something he wanted me to do for him!"

"Humph!" said Soames,--"Commissions!"

"You'll have your work cut out if you begin that sort of thing!" He said

no more.

Swithin opened his eyes at the mention of Robin Hill; it was a long way

for his horses, and he always dined at half-past seven, before the

rush at the Club began; the new chef took more trouble with an early

dinner--a lazy rascal!

He would like to have a look at the house, however. A house appealed to

any Forsyte, and especially to one who had been an auctioneer. After all

he said the distance was nothing. When he was a younger man he had had

rooms at Richmond for many years, kept his carriage and pair there, and

drove them up and down to business every day of his life.

Four-in-hand Forsyte they called him! His T-cart, his horses had been

known from Hyde Park Corner to the Star and Garter. The Duke of Z....

wanted to get hold of them, would have given him double the money, but

he had kept them; know a good thing when you have it, eh? A look of

solemn pride came portentously on his shaven square old face, he rolled

his head in his stand-up collar, like a turkey-cock preening himself.

She was really--a charming woman! He enlarged upon her frock afterwards

to Aunt Juley, who held up her hands at his way of putting it.

Fitted her like a skin--tight as a drum; that was how he liked 'em,

all of a piece, none of your daverdy, scarecrow women! He gazed at Mrs.

Septimus Small, who took after James--long and thin.

"There's style about her," he went on, "fit for a king! And she's so

quiet with it too!"

"She seems to have made quite a conquest of you, any way," drawled Aunt

Hester from her corner.

Swithin heard extremely well when anybody attacked him.

"What's that?" he said. "I know a--pretty--woman when I see one, and all

I can say is, I don't see the young man about that's fit for her; but

perhaps--you--do, come, perhaps--you-do!"

"Oh?" murmured Aunt Hester, "ask Juley!"

Long before they reached Robin Hill, however, the unaccustomed airing

had made him terribly sleepy; he drove with his eyes closed, a life-time

of deportment alone keeping his tall and bulky form from falling askew.

Bosinney, who was watching, came out to meet them, and all three

entered the house together; Swithin in front making play with a stout

gold-mounted Malacca cane, put into his hand by Adolf, for his knees

were feeling the effects of their long stay in the same position. He had

assumed his fur coat, to guard against the draughts of the unfinished

house.

The staircase--he said--was handsome! the baronial style! They would

want some statuary about! He came to a standstill between the columns of

the doorway into the inner court, and held out his cane inquiringly.

What was this to be--this vestibule, or whatever they called it? But

gazing at the skylight, inspiration came to him.

"Ah! the billiard-room!"

When told it was to be a tiled court with plants in the centre, he

turned to Irene:

"Waste this on plants? You take my advice and have a billiard table

here!"

Irene smiled. She had lifted her veil, banding it like a nun's coif

across her forehead, and the smile of her dark eyes below this seemed to

Swithin more charming than ever. He nodded. She would take his advice he

saw.

He had little to say of the drawing or dining-rooms, which he described

as "spacious"; but fell into such raptures as he permitted to a man of

his dignity, in the wine-cellar, to which he descended by stone steps,

Bosinney going first with a light.

"You'll have room here," he said, "for six or seven hundred dozen--a

very pooty little cellar!"

Bosinney having expressed the wish to show them the house from the copse

below, Swithin came to a stop.

"There's a fine view from here," he remarked; "you haven't such a thing

as a chair?"

A chair was brought him from Bosinney's tent.

"You go down," he said blandly; "you two! I'll sit here and look at the

view."

He sat down by the oak tree, in the sun; square and upright, with one

hand stretched out, resting on the nob of his cane, the other planted on

his knee; his fur coat thrown open, his hat, roofing with its flat

top the pale square of his face; his stare, very blank, fixed on the

landscape.

He nodded to them as they went off down through the fields. He was,

indeed, not sorry to be left thus for a quiet moment of reflection. The

air was balmy, not too much heat in the sun; the prospect a fine one,

a remarka.... His head fell a little to one side; he jerked it up and

thought: Odd! He--ah! They were waving to him from the bottom! He put

up his hand, and moved it more than once. They were active--the prospect

was remar.... His head fell to the left, he jerked it up at once; it

fell to the right. It remained there; he was asleep.

And asleep, a sentinel on the--top of the rise, he appeared to rule over

this prospect--remarkable--like some image blocked out by the special

artist, of primeval Forsytes in pagan days, to record the domination of

mind over matter!

And all the unnumbered generations of his yeoman ancestors, wont of a

Sunday to stand akimbo surveying their little plots of land, their grey

unmoving eyes hiding their instinct with its hidden roots of violence,

their instinct for possession to the exclusion of all the world--all

these unnumbered generations seemed to sit there with him on the top of

the rise.

But from him, thus slumbering, his jealous Forsyte spirit travelled far,

into God-knows-what jungle of fancies; with those two young people, to

see what they were doing down there in the copse--in the copse where

the spring was running riot with the scent of sap and bursting buds,

the song of birds innumerable, a carpet of bluebells and sweet growing

things, and the sun caught like gold in the tops of the trees; to see

what they were doing, walking along there so close together on the path

that was too narrow; walking along there so close that they were always

touching; to watch Irene's eyes, like dark thieves, stealing the heart

out of the spring. And a great unseen chaperon, his spirit was there,

stopping with them to look at the little furry corpse of a mole, not

dead an hour, with his mushroom-and-silver coat untouched by the rain or

dew; watching over Irene's bent head, and the soft look of her pitying

eyes; and over that young man's head, gazing at her so hard, so

strangely. Walking on with them, too, across the open space where a

wood-cutter had been at work, where the bluebells were trampled down,

and a trunk had swayed and staggered down from its gashed stump.

Climbing it with them, over, and on to the very edge of the copse,

whence there stretched an undiscovered country, from far away in which

came the sounds, 'Cuckoo-cuckoo!'

Silent, standing with them there, and uneasy at their silence! Very

queer, very strange!

Then back again, as though guilty, through the wood--back to the

cutting, still silent, amongst the songs of birds that never ceased, and

the wild scent--hum! what was it--like that herb they put in--back to

the log across the path....

And then unseen, uneasy, flapping above them, trying to make noises,

his Forsyte spirit watched her balanced on the log, her pretty figure

swaying, smiling down at that young man gazing up with such strange,

shining eyes, slipping now--a--ah! falling, o--oh! sliding--down his

breast; her soft, warm body clutched, her head bent back from his

lips; his kiss; her recoil; his cry: "You must know--I love you!" Must

know--indeed, a pretty...? Love! Hah!

Swithin awoke; virtue had gone out of him. He had a taste in his mouth.

Where was he?

Damme! He had been asleep!

He had dreamed something about a new soup, with a taste of mint in it.

Those young people--where had they got to? His left leg had pins and

needles.

"Adolf!" The rascal was not there; the rascal was asleep somewhere.

He stood up, tall, square, bulky in his fur, looking anxiously down over

the fields, and presently he saw them coming.

Irene was in front; that young fellow--what had they nicknamed him--'The

Buccaneer?' looked precious hangdog there behind her; had got a flea in

his ear, he shouldn't wonder. Serve him right, taking her down all that

way to look at the house! The proper place to look at a house from was

the lawn.

They saw him. He extended his arm, and moved it spasmodically to

encourage them. But they had stopped. What were they standing there for,

talking--talking? They came on again. She had been, giving him a rub, he

had not the least doubt of it, and no wonder, over a house like that--a

great ugly thing, not the sort of house he was accustomed to.

He looked intently at their faces, with his pale, immovable stare. That

young man looked very queer!

"You'll never make anything of this!" he said tartly, pointing at the

mansion;--"too newfangled!"

Bosinney gazed at him as though he had not heard; and Swithin afterwards

described him to Aunt Hester as "an extravagant sort of fellow very odd

way of looking at you--a bumpy beggar!"

What gave rise to this sudden piece of psychology he did not state;

possibly Bosinney's, prominent forehead and cheekbones and chin, or

something hungry in his face, which quarrelled with Swithin's conception

of the calm satiety that should characterize the perfect gentleman.

He brightened up at the mention of tea. He had a contempt for tea--his

brother Jolyon had been in tea; made a lot of money by it--but he was

so thirsty, and had such a taste in his mouth, that he was prepared to

drink anything. He longed to inform Irene of the taste in his mouth--she

was so sympathetic--but it would not be a distinguished thing to do; he

rolled his tongue round, and faintly smacked it against his palate.

In a far corner of the tent Adolf was bending his cat-like moustaches

over a kettle. He left it at once to draw the cork of a pint-bottle of

champagne. Swithin smiled, and, nodding at Bosinney, said: "Why, you're

quite a Monte Cristo!" This celebrated novel--one of the half-dozen he

had read--had produced an extraordinary impression on his mind.

Taking his glass from the table, he held it away from him to scrutinize

the colour; thirsty as he was, it was not likely that he was going to

drink trash! Then, placing it to his lips, he took a sip.

"A very nice wine," he said at last, passing it before his nose; "not

the equal of my Heidsieck!"

It was at this moment that the idea came to him which he afterwards

imparted at Timothy's in this nutshell: "I shouldn't wonder a bit if

that architect chap were sweet upon Mrs. Soames!"

And from this moment his pale, round eyes never ceased to bulge with the

interest of his discovery.

"The fellow," he said to Mrs. Septimus, "follows her about with his

eyes like a dog--the bumpy beggar! I don't wonder at it--she's a very

charming woman, and, I should say, the pink of discretion!" A vague

consciousness of perfume caging about Irene, like that from a flower

with half-closed petals and a passionate heart, moved him to the

creation of this image. "But I wasn't sure of it," he said, "till I saw

him pick up her handkerchief."

Mrs. Small's eyes boiled with excitement.

"And did he give it her back?" she asked.

"Give it back?" said Swithin: "I saw him slobber on it when he thought I

wasn't looking!"

Mrs. Small gasped--too interested to speak.

"But she gave him no encouragement," went on Swithin; he stopped, and

stared for a minute or two in the way that alarmed Aunt Hester so--he

had suddenly recollected that, as they were starting back in the

phaeton, she had given Bosinney her hand a second time, and let it stay

there too.... He had touched his horses smartly with the whip, anxious

to get her all to himself. But she had looked back, and she had not

answered his first question; neither had he been able to see her

face--she had kept it hanging down.

There is somewhere a picture, which Swithin has not seen, of a man

sitting on a rock, and by him, immersed in the still, green water, a

sea-nymph lying on her back, with her hand on her naked breast. She has

a half-smile on her face--a smile of hopeless surrender and of secret

joy.

Seated by Swithin's side, Irene may have been smiling like that.

When, warmed by champagne, he had her all to himself, he unbosomed

himself of his wrongs; of his smothered resentment against the new

chef at the club; his worry over the house in Wigmore Street, where the

rascally tenant had gone bankrupt through helping his brother-in-law as

if charity did not begin at home; of his deafness, too, and that pain he

sometimes got in his right side. She listened, her eyes swimming under

their lids. He thought she was thinking deeply of his troubles, and

pitied himself terribly. Yet in his fur coat, with frogs across the

breast, his top hat aslant, driving this beautiful woman, he had never

felt more distinguished.

A coster, however, taking his girl for a Sunday airing, seemed to have

the same impression about himself. This person had flogged his donkey

into a gallop alongside, and sat, upright as a waxwork, in his shallopy

chariot, his chin settled pompously on a red handkerchief, like

Swithin's on his full cravat; while his girl, with the ends of a

fly-blown boa floating out behind, aped a woman of fashion. Her swain

moved a stick with a ragged bit of string dangling from the end,

reproducing with strange fidelity the circular flourish of Swithin's

whip, and rolled his head at his lady with a leer that had a weird

likeness to Swithin's primeval stare.

Though for a time unconscious of the lowly ruffian's presence, Swithin

presently took it into his head that he was being guyed. He laid his

whip-lash across the mares flank. The two chariots, however, by some

unfortunate fatality continued abreast. Swithin's yellow, puffy face

grew red; he raised his whip to lash the costermonger, but was saved

from so far forgetting his dignity by a special intervention of

Providence. A carriage driving out through a gate forced phaeton and

donkey-cart into proximity; the wheels grated, the lighter vehicle

skidded, and was overturned.

Swithin did not look round. On no account would he have pulled up to

help the ruffian. Serve him right if he had broken his neck!

But he could not if he would. The greys had taken alarm. The phaeton

swung from side to side, and people raised frightened faces as they went

dashing past. Swithin's great arms, stretched at full length, tugged at

the reins. His cheeks were puffed, his lips compressed, his swollen face

was of a dull, angry red.

Irene had her hand on the rail, and at every lurch she gripped it

tightly. Swithin heard her ask:

"Are we going to have an accident, Uncle Swithin?"

He gasped out between his pants: "It's nothing; a--little fresh!"

"I've never been in an accident."

"Don't you move!" He took a look at her. She was smiling, perfectly

calm. "Sit still," he repeated. "Never fear, I'll get you home!"

And in the midst of all his terrible efforts, he was surprised to hear

her answer in a voice not like her own:

"I don't care if I never get home!"

The carriage giving a terrific lurch, Swithin's exclamation was jerked

back into his throat. The horses, winded by the rise of a hill, now

steadied to a trot, and finally stopped of their own accord.

"When"--Swithin described it at Timothy's--"I pulled 'em up, there she

was as cool as myself. God bless my soul! she behaved as if she didn't

care whether she broke her neck or not! What was it she said: 'I don't

care if I never get home?" Leaning over the handle of his cane, he

wheezed out, to Mrs. Small's terror: "And I'm not altogether surprised,

with a finickin' feller like young Soames for a husband!"

It did not occur to him to wonder what Bosinney had done after they had

left him there alone; whether he had gone wandering about like the dog

to which Swithin had compared him; wandering down to that copse where

the spring was still in riot, the cuckoo still calling from afar; gone

down there with her handkerchief pressed to lips, its fragrance mingling

with the scent of mint and thyme. Gone down there with such a wild,

exquisite pain in his heart that he could have cried out among the

trees. Or what, indeed, the fellow had done. In fact, till he came to

Timothy's, Swithin had forgotten all about him.

CHAPTER IV--JAMES GOES TO SEE FOR HIMSELF

Those ignorant of Forsyte 'Change would not, perhaps, foresee all the

stir made by Irene's visit to the house.

After Swithin had related at Timothy's the full story of his memorable

drive, the same, with the least suspicion of curiosity, the merest touch

of malice, and a real desire to do good, was passed on to June.

"And what a dreadful thing to say, my dear!" ended Aunt Juley; "that

about not going home. What did she mean?"

It was a strange recital for the girl. She heard it flushing painfully,

and, suddenly, with a curt handshake, took her departure.

"Almost rude!" Mrs. Small said to Aunt Hester, when June was gone.

The proper construction was put on her reception of the news. She was

upset. Something was therefore very wrong. Odd! She and Irene had been

such friends!

It all tallied too well with whispers and hints that had been going

about for some time past. Recollections of Euphemia's account of the

visit to the theatre--Mr. Bosinney always at Soames's? Oh, indeed! Yes,

of course, he would be about the house! Nothing open. Only upon the

greatest, the most important provocation was it necessary to say

anything open on Forsyte 'Change. This machine was too nicely adjusted;

a hint, the merest trifling expression of regret or doubt, sufficed to

set the family soul so sympathetic--vibrating. No one desired that harm

should come of these vibrations--far from it; they were set in motion

with the best intentions, with the feeling, that each member of the

family had a stake in the family soul.

And much kindness lay at the bottom of the gossip; it would frequently

result in visits of condolence being made, in accordance with the

customs of Society, thereby conferring a real benefit upon the

sufferers, and affording consolation to the sound, who felt pleasantly

that someone at all events was suffering from that from which they

themselves were not suffering. In fact, it was simply a desire to keep

things well-aired, the desire which animates the Public Press, that

brought James, for instance, into communication with Mrs. Septimus,

Mrs. Septimus, with the little Nicholases, the little Nicholases with

who-knows-whom, and so on. That great class to which they had risen,

and now belonged, demanded a certain candour, a still more certain

reticence. This combination guaranteed their membership.

Many of the younger Forsytes felt, very naturally, and would openly

declare, that they did not want their affairs pried into; but so

powerful was the invisible, magnetic current of family gossip, that for

the life of them they could not help knowing all about everything. It

was felt to be hopeless.

One of them (young Roger) had made an heroic attempt to free the rising

generation, by speaking of Timothy as an 'old cat.' The effort had

justly recoiled upon himself; the words, coming round in the most

delicate way to Aunt Juley's ears, were repeated by her in a shocked

voice to Mrs. Roger, whence they returned again to young Roger.

And, after all, it was only the wrong-doers who suffered; as, for

instance, George, when he lost all that money playing billiards; or

young Roger himself, when he was so dreadfully near to marrying the girl

to whom, it was whispered, he was already married by the laws of Nature;

or again Irene, who was thought, rather than said, to be in danger.

All this was not only pleasant but salutary. And it made so many hours

go lightly at Timothy's in the Bayswater Road; so many hours that must

otherwise have been sterile and heavy to those three who lived there;

and Timothy's was but one of hundreds of such homes in this City of

London--the homes of neutral persons of the secure classes, who are out

of the battle themselves, and must find their reason for existing, in

the battles of others.

But for the sweetness of family gossip, it must indeed have been lonely

there. Rumours and tales, reports, surmises--were they not the children

of the house, as dear and precious as the prattling babes the brother

and sisters had missed in their own journey? To talk about them was

as near as they could get to the possession of all those children and

grandchildren, after whom their soft hearts yearned. For though it is

doubtful whether Timothy's heart yearned, it is indubitable that at the

arrival of each fresh Forsyte child he was quite upset.

Useless for young Roger to say, "Old cat!" for Euphemia to hold up her

hands and cry: "Oh! those three!" and break into her silent laugh with

the squeak at the end. Useless, and not too kind.

The situation which at this stage might seem, and especially to Forsyte

eyes, strange--not to say 'impossible'--was, in view of certain facts,

not so strange after all. Some things had been lost sight of. And first,

in the security bred of many harmless marriages, it had been forgotten

that Love is no hot-house flower, but a wild plant, born of a wet night,

born of an hour of sunshine; sprung from wild seed, blown along the road

by a wild wind. A wild plant that, when it blooms by chance within the

hedge of our gardens, we call a flower; and when it blooms outside we

call a weed; but, flower or weed, whose scent and colour are always,

wild! And further--the facts and figures of their own lives being

against the perception of this truth--it was not generally recognised

by Forsytes that, where, this wild plant springs, men and women are but

moths around the pale, flame-like blossom.

It was long since young Jolyon's escapade--there was danger of a

tradition again arising that people in their position never cross the

hedge to pluck that flower; that one could reckon on having love, like

measles, once in due season, and getting over it comfortably for all

time--as with measles, on a soothing mixture of butter and honey--in the

arms of wedlock.

Of all those whom this strange rumour about Bosinney and Mrs. Soames

reached, James was the most affected. He had long forgotten how he had

hovered, lanky and pale, in side whiskers of chestnut hue, round Emily,

in the days of his own courtship. He had long forgotten the small house

in the purlieus of Mayfair, where he had spent the early days of his

married life, or rather, he had long forgotten the early days, not the

small house,--a Forsyte never forgot a house--he had afterwards sold it

at a clear profit of four hundred pounds.

He had long forgotten those days, with their hopes and fears and doubts

about the prudence of the match (for Emily, though pretty, had nothing,

and he himself at that time was making a bare thousand a year), and that

strange, irresistible attraction which had drawn him on, till he felt

he must die if he could not marry the girl with the fair hair, looped so

neatly back, the fair arms emerging from a skin-tight bodice, the fair

form decorously shielded by a cage of really stupendous circumference.

James had passed through the fire, but he had passed also through the

river of years which washes out the fire; he had experienced the saddest

experience of all--forgetfulness of what it was like to be in love.

Forgotten! Forgotten so long, that he had forgotten even that he had

forgotten.

And now this rumour had come upon him, this rumour about his son's

wife; very vague, a shadow dodging among the palpable, straightforward

appearances of things, unreal, unintelligible as a ghost, but carrying

with it, like a ghost, inexplicable terror.

He tried to bring it home to his mind, but it was no more use than

trying to apply to himself one of those tragedies he read of daily in

his evening paper. He simply could not. There could be nothing in it.

It was all their nonsense. She didn't get on with Soames as well as she

might, but she was a good little thing--a good little thing!

Like the not inconsiderable majority of men, James relished a nice

little bit of scandal, and would say, in a matter-of-fact tone, licking

his lips, "Yes, yes--she and young Dyson; they tell me they're living at

Monte Carlo!"

But the significance of an affair of this sort--of its past, its

present, or its future--had never struck him. What it meant, what

torture and raptures had gone to its construction, what slow,

overmastering fate had lurked within the facts, very naked, sometimes

sordid, but generally spicy, presented to his gaze. He was not in the

habit of blaming, praising, drawing deductions, or generalizing at all

about such things; he simply listened rather greedily, and repeated what

he was told, finding considerable benefit from the practice, as from the

consumption of a sherry and bitters before a meal.

Now, however, that such a thing--or rather the rumour, the breath of

it--had come near him personally, he felt as in a fog, which filled

his mouth full of a bad, thick flavour, and made it difficult to draw

breath.

A scandal! A possible scandal!

To repeat this word to himself thus was the only way in which he could

focus or make it thinkable. He had forgotten the sensations necessary

for understanding the progress, fate, or meaning of any such business;

he simply could no longer grasp the possibilities of people running any

risk for the sake of passion.

Amongst all those persons of his acquaintance, who went into the City

day after day and did their business there, whatever it was, and in

their leisure moments bought shares, and houses, and ate dinners, and

played games, as he was told, it would have seemed to him ridiculous to

suppose that there were any who would run risks for the sake of anything

so recondite, so figurative, as passion.

Passion! He seemed, indeed, to have heard of it, and rules such as 'A

young man and a young woman ought never to be trusted together' were

fixed in his mind as the parallels of latitude are fixed on a map (for

all Forsytes, when it comes to 'bed-rock' matters of fact, have quite

a fine taste in realism); but as to anything else--well, he could only

appreciate it at all through the catch-word 'scandal.'

Ah! but there was no truth in it--could not be. He was not afraid; she

was really a good little thing. But there it was when you got a thing

like that into your mind. And James was of a nervous temperament--one

of those men whom things will not leave alone, who suffer tortures from

anticipation and indecision. For fear of letting something slip that

he might otherwise secure, he was physically unable to make up his mind

until absolutely certain that, by not making it up, he would suffer

loss.

In life, however, there were many occasions when the business of making

up his mind did not even rest with himself, and this was one of them.

What could he do? Talk it over with Soames? That would only make matters

worse. And, after all, there was nothing in it, he felt sure.

It was all that house. He had mistrusted the idea from the first. What

did Soames want to go into the country for? And, if he must go spending

a lot of money building himself a house, why not have a first-rate man,

instead of this young Bosinney, whom nobody knew anything about? He had

told them how it would be. And he had heard that the house was costing

Soames a pretty penny beyond what he had reckoned on spending.

This fact, more than any other, brought home to James the real danger

of the situation. It was always like this with these 'artistic' chaps;

a sensible man should have nothing to say to them. He had warned Irene,

too. And see what had come of it!

And it suddenly sprang into James's mind that he ought to go and see for

himself. In the midst of that fog of uneasiness in which his mind was

enveloped the notion that he could go and look at the house afforded him

inexplicable satisfaction. It may have been simply the decision to

do something--more possibly the fact that he was going to look at a

house--that gave him relief. He felt that in staring at an edifice

of bricks and mortar, of wood and stone, built by the suspected man

himself, he would be looking into the heart of that rumour about Irene.

Without saying a word, therefore, to anyone, he took a hansom to the

station and proceeded by train to Robin Hill; thence--there being no

'flies,' in accordance with the custom of the neighbourhood--he found

himself obliged to walk.

He started slowly up the hill, his angular knees and high shoulders bent

complainingly, his eyes fixed on his feet, yet, neat for all that,

in his high hat and his frock-coat, on which was the speckless gloss

imparted by perfect superintendence. Emily saw to that; that is, she did

not, of course, see to it--people of good position not seeing to each

other's buttons, and Emily was of good position--but she saw that the

butler saw to it.

He had to ask his way three times; on each occasion he repeated the

directions given him, got the man to repeat them, then repeated them a

second time, for he was naturally of a talkative disposition, and one

could not be too careful in a new neighbourhood.

He kept assuring them that it was a new house he was looking for; it

was only, however, when he was shown the roof through the trees that

he could feel really satisfied that he had not been directed entirely

wrong.

A heavy sky seemed to cover the world with the grey whiteness of a

whitewashed ceiling. There was no freshness or fragrance in the air. On

such a day even British workmen scarcely cared to do more then they were

obliged, and moved about their business without the drone of talk which

whiles away the pangs of labour.

Through spaces of the unfinished house, shirt-sleeved figures worked

slowly, and sounds arose--spasmodic knockings, the scraping of metal,

the sawing of wood, with the rumble of wheelbarrows along boards; now

and again the foreman's dog, tethered by a string to an oaken beam,

whimpered feebly, with a sound like the singing of a kettle.

The fresh-fitted window-panes, daubed each with a white patch in the

centre, stared out at James like the eyes of a blind dog.

And the building chorus went on, strident and mirthless under the

grey-white sky. But the thrushes, hunting amongst the fresh-turned earth

for worms, were silent quite.

James picked his way among the heaps of gravel--the drive was being

laid--till he came opposite the porch. Here he stopped and raised his

eyes. There was but little to see from this point of view, and that

little he took in at once; but he stayed in this position many minutes,

and who shall know of what he thought.

His china-blue eyes under white eyebrows that jutted out in little

horns, never stirred; the long upper lip of his wide mouth, between the

fine white whiskers, twitched once or twice; it was easy to see from

that anxious rapt expression, whence Soames derived the handicapped

look which sometimes came upon his face. James might have been saying to

himself: 'I don't know--life's a tough job.'

In this position Bosinney surprised him.

James brought his eyes down from whatever bird's-nest they had been

looking for in the sky to Bosinney's face, on which was a kind of

humorous scorn.

"How do you do, Mr. Forsyte? Come down to see for yourself?"

It was exactly what James, as we know, had come for, and he was made

correspondingly uneasy. He held out his hand, however, saying:

"How are you?" without looking at Bosinney.

The latter made way for him with an ironical smile.

James scented something suspicious in this courtesy. "I should like

to walk round the outside first," he said, "and see what you've been

doing!"

A flagged terrace of rounded stones with a list of two or three inches

to port had been laid round the south-east and south-west sides of the

house, and ran with a bevelled edge into mould, which was in preparation

for being turfed; along this terrace James led the way.

"Now what did this cost?" he asked, when he saw the terrace extending

round the corner.

"What should you think?" inquired Bosinney.

"How should I know?" replied James somewhat nonplussed; "two or three

hundred, I dare say!"

"The exact sum!"

James gave him a sharp look, but the architect appeared unconscious, and

he put the answer down to mishearing.

On arriving at the garden entrance, he stopped to look at the view.

"That ought to come down," he said, pointing to the oak-tree.

"You think so? You think that with the tree there you don't get enough

view for your money."

Again James eyed him suspiciously--this young man had a peculiar way of

putting things: "Well!" he said, with a perplexed, nervous, emphasis, "I

don't see what you want with a tree."

"It shall come down to-morrow," said Bosinney.

James was alarmed. "Oh," he said, "don't go saying I said it was to come

down! I know nothing about it!"

"No?"

James went on in a fluster: "Why, what should I know about it? It's

nothing to do with me! You do it on your own responsibility."

"You'll allow me to mention your name?"

James grew more and more alarmed: "I don't know what you want mentioning

my name for," he muttered; "you'd better leave the tree alone. It's not

your tree!"

He took out a silk handkerchief and wiped his brow. They entered the

house. Like Swithin, James was impressed by the inner court-yard.

"You must have spent a deuce of a lot of money here," he said, after

staring at the columns and gallery for some time. "Now, what did it cost

to put up those columns?"

"I can't tell you off-hand," thoughtfully answered Bosinney, "but I know

it was a deuce of a lot!"

"I should think so," said James. "I should...." He caught the

architect's eye, and broke off. And now, whenever he came to anything of

which he desired to know the cost, he stifled that curiosity.

Bosinney appeared determined that he should see everything, and had not

James been of too 'noticing' a nature, he would certainly have found

himself going round the house a second time. He seemed so anxious to be

asked questions, too, that James felt he must be on his guard. He began

to suffer from his exertions, for, though wiry enough for a man of his

long build, he was seventy-five years old.

He grew discouraged; he seemed no nearer to anything, had not obtained

from his inspection any of the knowledge he had vaguely hoped for. He

had merely increased his dislike and mistrust of this young man, who had

tired him out with his politeness, and in whose manner he now certainly

detected mockery.

The fellow was sharper than he had thought, and better-looking than he

had hoped. He had a--a 'don't care' appearance that James, to whom risk

was the most intolerable thing in life, did not appreciate; a peculiar

smile, too, coming when least expected; and very queer eyes. He reminded

James, as he said afterwards, of a hungry cat. This was as near as he

could get, in conversation with Emily, to a description of the peculiar

exasperation, velvetiness, and mockery, of which Bosinney's manner had

been composed.

At last, having seen all that was to be seen, he came out again at the

door where he had gone in; and now, feeling that he was wasting time and

strength and money, all for nothing, he took the courage of a Forsyte in

both hands, and, looking sharply at Bosinney, said:

"I dare say you see a good deal of my daughter-in-law; now, what does

she think of the house? But she hasn't seen it, I suppose?"

This he said, knowing all about Irene's visit not, of course, that there

was anything in the visit, except that extraordinary remark she had made

about 'not caring to get home'--and the story of how June had taken the

news!

He had determined, by this way of putting the question, to give Bosinney

a chance, as he said to himself.

The latter was long in answering, but kept his eyes with uncomfortable

steadiness on James.

"She has seen the house, but I can't tell you what she thinks of it."

Nervous and baffled, James was constitutionally prevented from letting

the matter drop.

"Oh!" he said, "she has seen it? Soames brought her down, I suppose?"

Bosinney smilingly replied: "Oh, no!"

"What, did she come down alone?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then--who brought her?"

"I really don't know whether I ought to tell you who brought her."

To James, who knew that it was Swithin, this answer appeared

incomprehensible.

"Why!" he stammered, "you know that...." but he stopped, suddenly

perceiving his danger.

"Well," he said, "if you don't want to tell me I suppose you won't!

Nobody tells me anything."

Somewhat to his surprise Bosinney asked him a question.

"By the by," he said, "could you tell me if there are likely to be any

more of you coming down? I should like to be on the spot!"

"Any more?" said James bewildered, "who should there be more? I don't

know of any more. Good-bye?"

Looking at the ground he held out his hand, crossed the palm of it with

Bosinney's, and taking his umbrella just above the silk, walked away

along the terrace.

Before he turned the corner he glanced back, and saw Bosinney following

him slowly--'slinking along the wall' as he put it to himself, 'like a

great cat.' He paid no attention when the young fellow raised his hat.

Outside the drive, and out of sight, he slackened his pace still

more. Very slowly, more bent than when he came, lean, hungry, and

disheartened, he made his way back to the station.

The Buccaneer, watching him go so sadly home, felt sorry perhaps for his

behaviour to the old man.

CHAPTER V--SOAMES AND BOSINNEY CORRESPOND

James said nothing to his son of this visit to the house; but, having

occasion to go to Timothy's one morning on a matter connected with a

drainage scheme which was being forced by the sanitary authorities on

his brother, he mentioned it there.

It was not, he said, a bad house. He could see that a good deal could be

made of it. The fellow was clever in his way, though what it was going

to cost Soames before it was done with he didn't know.

Euphemia Forsyte, who happened to be in the room--she had come round to

borrow the Rev. Mr. Scoles' last novel, 'Passion and Paregoric', which

was having such a vogue--chimed in.

"I saw Irene yesterday at the Stores; she and Mr. Bosinney were having a

nice little chat in the Groceries."

It was thus, simply, that she recorded a scene which had really made

a deep and complicated impression on her. She had been hurrying to the

silk department of the Church and Commercial Stores--that Institution

than which, with its admirable system, admitting only guaranteed persons

on a basis of payment before delivery, no emporium can be more highly

recommended to Forsytes--to match a piece of prunella silk for her

mother, who was waiting in the carriage outside.

Passing through the Groceries her eye was unpleasantly attracted by the

back view of a very beautiful figure. It was so charmingly proportioned,

so balanced, and so well clothed, that Euphemia's instinctive propriety

was at once alarmed; such figures, she knew, by intuition rather than

experience, were rarely connected with virtue--certainly never in her

mind, for her own back was somewhat difficult to fit.

Her suspicions were fortunately confirmed. A young man coming from the

Drugs had snatched off his hat, and was accosting the lady with the

unknown back.

It was then that she saw with whom she had to deal; the lady was

undoubtedly Mrs. Soames, the young man Mr. Bosinney. Concealing herself

rapidly over the purchase of a box of Tunisian dates, for she was

impatient of awkwardly meeting people with parcels in her hands, and

at the busy time of the morning, she was quite unintentionally an

interested observer of their little interview.

Mrs. Soames, usually somewhat pale, had a delightful colour in her

cheeks; and Mr. Bosinney's manner was strange, though attractive (she

thought him rather a distinguished-looking man, and George's name for

him, 'The Buccaneer'--about which there was something romantic--quite

charming). He seemed to be pleading. Indeed, they talked so

earnestly--or, rather, he talked so earnestly, for Mrs. Soames did not

say much--that they caused, inconsiderately, an eddy in the traffic. One

nice old General, going towards Cigars, was obliged to step quite out of

the way, and chancing to look up and see Mrs. Soames' face, he actually

took off his hat, the old fool! So like a man!

But it was Mrs. Soames' eyes that worried Euphemia. She never once

looked at Mr. Bosinney until he moved on, and then she looked after him.

And, oh, that look!

On that look Euphemia had spent much anxious thought. It is not too much

to say that it had hurt her with its dark, lingering softness, for

all the world as though the woman wanted to drag him back, and unsay

something she had been saying.

Ah, well, she had had no time to go deeply into the matter just

then, with that prunella silk on her hands; but she was 'very

intriguee'--very! She had just nodded to Mrs. Soames, to show her that

she had seen; and, as she confided, in talking it over afterwards, to

her chum Francie (Roger's daughter), "Didn't she look caught out

just?..."

James, most averse at the first blush to accepting any news confirmatory

of his own poignant suspicions, took her up at once.

"Oh" he said, "they'd be after wall-papers no doubt."

Euphemia smiled. "In the Groceries?" she said softly; and, taking

'Passion and Paregoric' from the table, added: "And so you'll lend me

this, dear Auntie? Good-bye!" and went away.

James left almost immediately after; he was late as it was.

When he reached the office of Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte, he found

Soames, sitting in his revolving, chair, drawing up a defence. The

latter greeted his father with a curt good-morning, and, taking an

envelope from his pocket, said:

"It may interest you to look through this."

James read as follows:

'309D, SLOANE STREET, May 15,

'DEAR FORSYTE,

'The construction of your house being now completed, my duties as

architect have come to an end. If I am to go on with the business of

decoration, which at your request I undertook, I should like you to

clearly understand that I must have a free hand.

'You never come down without suggesting something that goes counter to

my scheme. I have here three letters from you, each of which recommends

an article I should never dream of putting in. I had your father here

yesterday afternoon, who made further valuable suggestions.

'Please make up your mind, therefore, whether you want me to decorate

for you, or to retire which on the whole I should prefer to do.

'But understand that, if I decorate, I decorate alone, without

interference of any sort.

If I do the thing, I will do it thoroughly, but I must have a free hand.

'Yours truly,

'PHILIP BOSINNEY.'

The exact and immediate cause of this letter cannot, of course, be told,

though it is not improbable that Bosinney may have been moved by some

sudden revolt against his position towards Soames--that eternal position

of Art towards Property--which is so admirably summed up, on the back of

the most indispensable of modern appliances, in a sentence comparable to

the very finest in Tacitus:

THOS. T. SORROW, Inventor. BERT M. PADLAND, Proprietor.

"What are you going to say to him?" James asked.

Soames did not even turn his head. "I haven't made up my mind," he said,

and went on with his defence.

A client of his, having put some buildings on a piece of ground that

did not belong to him, had been suddenly and most irritatingly warned

to take them off again. After carefully going into the facts, however,

Soames had seen his way to advise that his client had what was known as

a title by possession, and that, though undoubtedly the ground did not

belong to him, he was entitled to keep it, and had better do so; and

he was now following up this advice by taking steps to--as the sailors

say--'make it so.'

He had a distinct reputation for sound advice; people saying of him: "Go

to young Forsyte--a long-headed fellow!" and he prized this reputation

highly.

His natural taciturnity was in his favour; nothing could be more

calculated to give people, especially people with property (Soames had

no other clients), the impression that he was a safe man. And he was

safe. Tradition, habit, education, inherited aptitude, native

caution, all joined to form a solid professional honesty, superior to

temptation--from the very fact that it was built on an innate avoidance

of risk. How could he fall, when his soul abhorred circumstances which

render a fall possible--a man cannot fall off the floor!

And those countless Forsytes, who, in the course of innumerable

transactions concerned with property of all sorts (from wives to water

rights), had occasion for the services of a safe man, found it

both reposeful and profitable to confide in Soames. That slight

superciliousness of his, combined with an air of mousing amongst

precedents, was in his favour too--a man would not be supercilious

unless he knew!

He was really at the head of the business, for though James still came

nearly every day to, see for himself, he did little now but sit in his

chair, twist his legs, slightly confuse things already decided, and

presently go away again, and the other partner, Bustard, was a poor

thing, who did a great deal of work, but whose opinion was never taken.

So Soames went steadily on with his defence. Yet it would be idle to say

that his mind was at ease. He was suffering from a sense of impending

trouble, that had haunted him for some time past. He tried to think it

physical--a condition of his liver--but knew that it was not.

He looked at his watch. In a quarter of an hour he was due at the

General Meeting of the New Colliery Company--one of Uncle Jolyon's

concerns; he should see Uncle Jolyon there, and say something to him

about Bosinney--he had not made up his mind what, but something--in any

case he should not answer this letter until he had seen Uncle Jolyon. He

got up and methodically put away the draft of his defence. Going into

a dark little cupboard, he turned up the light, washed his hands with a

piece of brown Windsor soap, and dried them on a roller towel. Then he

brushed his hair, paying strict attention to the parting, turned down

the light, took his hat, and saying he would be back at half-past two,

stepped into the Poultry.

It was not far to the Offices of the New Colliery Company in Ironmonger

Lane, where, and not at the Cannon Street Hotel, in accordance with

the more ambitious practice of other companies, the General Meeting

was always held. Old Jolyon had from the first set his face against the

Press. What business--he said--had the Public with his concerns!

Soames arrived on the stroke of time, and took his seat alongside the

Board, who, in a row, each Director behind his own ink-pot, faced their

Shareholders.

In the centre of this row old Jolyon, conspicuous in his black,

tightly-buttoned frock-coat and his white moustaches, was leaning

back with finger tips crossed on a copy of the Directors' report and

accounts.

On his right hand, always a little larger than life, sat the Secretary,

'Down-by-the-starn' Hemmings; an all-too-sad sadness beaming in his fine

eyes; his iron-grey beard, in mourning like the rest of him, giving the

feeling of an all-too-black tie behind it.

The occasion indeed was a melancholy one, only six weeks having elapsed

since that telegram had come from Scorrier, the mining expert, on

a private mission to the Mines, informing them that Pippin, their

Superintendent, had committed suicide in endeavouring, after his

extraordinary two years' silence, to write a letter to his Board. That

letter was on the table now; it would be read to the Shareholders, who

would of course be put into possession of all the facts.

Hemmings had often said to Soames, standing with his coat-tails divided

before the fireplace:

"What our Shareholders don't know about our affairs isn't worth knowing.

You may take that from me, Mr. Soames."

On one occasion, old Jolyon being present, Soames recollected a little

unpleasantness. His uncle had looked up sharply and said: "Don't

talk nonsense, Hemmings! You mean that what they do know isn't worth

knowing!" Old Jolyon detested humbug.

Hemmings, angry-eyed, and wearing a smile like that of a trained poodle,

had replied in an outburst of artificial applause: "Come, now, that's

good, sir--that's very good. Your uncle will have his joke!"

The next time he had seen Soames he had taken the opportunity of saying

to him: "The chairman's getting very old!--I can't get him to understand

things; and he's so wilful--but what can you expect, with a chin like

his?"

Soames had nodded.

Everyone knew that Uncle Jolyon's chin was a caution. He was looking

worried to-day, in spite of his General Meeting look; he (Soames) should

certainly speak to him about Bosinney.

Beyond old Jolyon on the left was little Mr. Booker, and he, too, wore

his General Meeting look, as though searching for some particularly

tender shareholder. And next him was the deaf director, with a frown;

and beyond the deaf director, again, was old Mr. Bleedham, very bland,

and having an air of conscious virtue--as well he might, knowing that

the brown-paper parcel he always brought to the Board-room was concealed

behind his hat (one of that old-fashioned class, of flat-brimmed

top-hats which go with very large bow ties, clean-shaven lips, fresh

cheeks, and neat little, white whiskers).

Soames always attended the General Meeting; it was considered better

that he should do so, in case 'anything should arise!' He glanced round

with his close, supercilious air at the walls of the room, where hung

plans of the mine and harbour, together with a large photograph of

a shaft leading to a working which had proved quite remarkably

unprofitable. This photograph--a witness to the eternal irony underlying

commercial enterprise--still retained its position on the--wall, an effigy

of the directors' pet, but dead, lamb.

And now old Jolyon rose, to present the report and accounts.

Veiling under a Jove-like serenity that perpetual antagonism deep-seated

in the bosom of a director towards his shareholders, he faced them

calmly. Soames faced them too. He knew most of them by sight. There was

old Scrubsole, a tar man, who always came, as Hemmings would say, 'to

make himself nasty,' a cantankerous-looking old fellow with a red face,

a jowl, and an enormous low-crowned hat reposing on his knee. And the

Rev. Mr. Boms, who always proposed a vote of thanks to the chairman, in

which he invariably expressed the hope that the Board would not forget

to elevate their employees, using the word with a double e, as

being more vigorous and Anglo-Saxon (he had the strong Imperialistic

tendencies of his cloth). It was his salutary custom to buttonhole a

director afterwards, and ask him whether he thought the coming year

would be good or bad; and, according to the trend of the answer, to buy

or sell three shares within the ensuing fortnight.

And there was that military man, Major O'Bally, who could not help

speaking, if only to second the re-election of the auditor, and who

sometimes caused serious consternation by taking toasts--proposals

rather--out of the hands of persons who had been flattered with little

slips of paper, entrusting the said proposals to their care.

These made up the lot, together with four or five strong, silent

shareholders, with whom Soames could sympathize--men of business, who

liked to keep an eye on their affairs for themselves, without being

fussy--good, solid men, who came to the City every day and went back in

the evening to good, solid wives.

Good, solid wives! There was something in that thought which roused the

nameless uneasiness in Soames again.

What should he say to his uncle? What answer should he make to this

letter?

. . . . "If any shareholder has any question to put, I shall be glad

to answer it." A soft thump. Old Jolyon had let the report and accounts

fall, and stood twisting his tortoise-shell glasses between thumb and

forefinger.

The ghost of a smile appeared on Soames' face. They had better hurry up

with their questions! He well knew his uncle's method (the ideal one)

of at once saying: "I propose, then, that the report and accounts be

adopted!" Never let them get their wind--shareholders were notoriously

wasteful of time!

A tall, white-bearded man, with a gaunt, dissatisfied face, arose:

"I believe I am in order, Mr. Chairman, in raising a question on this

figure of L5000 in the accounts. 'To the widow and family"' (he looked

sourly round), "'of our late superintendent,' who so--er--ill-advisedly

(I say--ill-advisedly) committed suicide, at a time when his services

were of the utmost value to this Company. You have stated that the

agreement which he has so unfortunately cut short with his own hand was

for a period of five years, of which one only had expired--I--"

Old Jolyon made a gesture of impatience.

"I believe I am in order, Mr. Chairman--I ask whether this amount

paid, or proposed to be paid, by the Board to the er--deceased--is

for services which might have been rendered to the Company--had he not

committed suicide?"

"It is in recognition of past services, which we all know--you as well

as any of us--to have been of vital value."

"Then, sir, all I have to say is that the services being past, the

amount is too much."

The shareholder sat down.

Old Jolyon waited a second and said: "I now propose that the report

and--"

The shareholder rose again: "May I ask if the Board realizes that it

is not their money which--I don't hesitate to say that if it were their

money...."

A second shareholder, with a round, dogged face, whom Soames recognised

as the late superintendent's brother-in-law, got up and said warmly: "In

my opinion, sir, the sum is not enough!"

The Rev. Mr. Boms now rose to his feet. "If I may venture to express

myself," he said, "I should say that the fact of the--er--deceased

having committed suicide should weigh very heavily--very heavily with

our worthy chairman. I have no doubt it has weighed with him, for--I say

this for myself and I think for everyone present (hear, hear)--he enjoys

our confidence in a high degree. We all desire, I should hope, to

be charitable. But I feel sure" (he-looked severely at the late

superintendent's brother-in-law) "that he will in some way, by some

written expression, or better perhaps by reducing the amount, record our

grave disapproval that so promising and valuable a life should have

been thus impiously removed from a sphere where both its own interests

and--if I may say so--our interests so imperatively demanded its

continuance. We should not--nay, we may not--countenance so grave a

dereliction of all duty, both human and divine."

The reverend gentleman resumed his seat. The late superintendent's

brother-in-law again rose: "What I have said I stick to," he said; "the

amount is not enough!"

The first shareholder struck in: "I challenge the legality of the

payment. In my opinion this payment is not legal. The Company's

solicitor is present; I believe I am in order in asking him the

question."

All eyes were now turned upon Soames. Something had arisen!

He stood up, close-lipped and cold; his nerves inwardly fluttered, his

attention tweaked away at last from contemplation of that cloud looming

on the horizon of his mind.

"The point," he said in a low, thin voice, "is by no means clear. As

there is no possibility of future consideration being received, it is

doubtful whether the payment is strictly legal. If it is desired, the

opinion of the court could be taken."

The superintendent's brother-in-law frowned, and said in a meaning tone:

"We have no doubt the opinion of the court could be taken. May I ask

the name of the gentleman who has given us that striking piece of

information? Mr. Soames Forsyte? Indeed!" He looked from Soames to old

Jolyon in a pointed manner.

A flush coloured Soames' pale cheeks, but his superciliousness did not

waver. Old Jolyon fixed his eyes on the speaker.

"If," he said, "the late superintendents brother-in-law has nothing more

to say, I propose that the report and accounts...."

At this moment, however, there rose one of those five silent, stolid

shareholders, who had excited Soames' sympathy. He said:

"I deprecate the proposal altogether. We are expected to give charity to

this man's wife and children, who, you tell us, were dependent on him.

They may have been; I do not care whether they were or not. I object to

the whole thing on principle. It is high time a stand was made against

this sentimental humanitarianism. The country is eaten up with it. I

object to my money being paid to these people of whom I know nothing,

who have done nothing to earn it. I object in toto; it is not business.

I now move that the report and accounts be put back, and amended by

striking out the grant altogether."

Old Jolyon had remained standing while the strong, silent man was

speaking. The speech awoke an echo in all hearts, voicing, as it did,

the worship of strong men, the movement against generosity, which had at

that time already commenced among the saner members of the community.

The words 'it is not business' had moved even the Board; privately

everyone felt that indeed it was not. But they knew also the chairman's

domineering temper and tenacity. He, too, at heart must feel that it was

not business; but he was committed to his own proposition. Would he go

back upon it? It was thought to be unlikely.

All waited with interest. Old Jolyon held up his hand; dark-rimmed

glasses depending between his finger and thumb quivered slightly with a

suggestion of menace.

He addressed the strong, silent shareholder.

"Knowing, as you do, the efforts of our late superintendent upon the

occasion of the explosion at the mines, do you seriously wish me to put

that amendment, sir?"

"I do."

Old Jolyon put the amendment.

"Does anyone second this?" he asked, looking calmly round.

And it was then that Soames, looking at his uncle, felt the power of

will that was in that old man. No one stirred. Looking straight into the

eyes of the strong, silent shareholder, old Jolyon said:

"I now move, 'That the report and accounts for the year 1886 be received

and adopted.' You second that? Those in favour signify the same in the

usual way. Contrary--no. Carried. The next business, gentlemen...."

Soames smiled. Certainly Uncle Jolyon had a way with him!

But now his attention relapsed upon Bosinney.

Odd how that fellow haunted his thoughts, even in business hours.

Irene's visit to the house--but there was nothing in that, except

that she might have told him; but then, again, she never did tell him

anything. She was more silent, more touchy, every day. He wished to God

the house were finished, and they were in it, away from London. Town did

not suit her; her nerves were not strong enough. That nonsense of the

separate room had cropped up again!

The meeting was breaking up now. Underneath the photograph of the lost

shaft Hemmings was buttonholed by the Rev. Mr. Boms. Little Mr. Booker,

his bristling eyebrows wreathed in angry smiles, was having a parting

turn-up with old Scrubsole. The two hated each other like poison. There

was some matter of a tar-contract between them, little Mr. Booker having

secured it from the Board for a nephew of his, over old Scrubsole's

head. Soames had heard that from Hemmings, who liked a gossip, more

especially about his directors, except, indeed, old Jolyon, of whom he

was afraid.

Soames awaited his opportunity. The last shareholder was vanishing

through the door, when he approached his uncle, who was putting on his

hat.

"Can I speak to you for a minute, Uncle Jolyon?"

It is uncertain what Soames expected to get out of this interview.

Apart from that somewhat mysterious awe in which Forsytes in general

held old Jolyon, due to his philosophic twist, or perhaps--as Hemmings

would doubtless have said--to his chin, there was, and always had been,

a subtle antagonism between the younger man and the old. It had lurked

under their dry manner of greeting, under their non-committal allusions

to each other, and arose perhaps from old Jolyon's perception of the

quiet tenacity ('obstinacy,' he rather naturally called it) of the young

man, of a secret doubt whether he could get his own way with him.

Both these Forsytes, wide asunder as the poles in many respects,

possessed in their different ways--to a greater degree than the rest of

the family--that essential quality of tenacious and prudent insight into

'affairs,' which is the highwater mark of their great class. Either of

them, with a little luck and opportunity, was equal to a lofty career;

either of them would have made a good financier, a great contractor,

a statesman, though old Jolyon, in certain of his moods when under

the influence of a cigar or of Nature--would have been capable of, not

perhaps despising, but certainly of questioning, his own high position,

while Soames, who never smoked cigars, would not.

Then, too, in old Jolyon's mind there was always the secret ache, that

the son of James--of James, whom he had always thought such a poor

thing, should be pursuing the paths of success, while his own son...!

And last, not least--for he was no more outside the radiation of

family gossip than any other Forsyte--he had now heard the sinister,

indefinite, but none the less disturbing rumour about Bosinney, and his

pride was wounded to the quick.

Characteristically, his irritation turned not against Irene but against

Soames. The idea that his nephew's wife (why couldn't the fellow

take better care of her--Oh! quaint injustice! as though Soames could

possibly take more care!)--should be drawing to herself June's lover,

was intolerably humiliating. And seeing the danger, he did not, like

James, hide it away in sheer nervousness, but owned with the dispassion

of his broader outlook, that it was not unlikely; there was something

very attractive about Irene!

He had a presentiment on the subject of Soames' communication as they

left the Board Room together, and went out into the noise and hurry of

Cheapside. They walked together a good minute without speaking, Soames

with his mousing, mincing step, and old Jolyon upright and using his

umbrella languidly as a walking-stick.

They turned presently into comparative quiet, for old Jolyon's way to a

second Board led him in the direction of Moorage Street.

Then Soames, without lifting his eyes, began: "I've had this letter from

Bosinney. You see what he says; I thought I'd let you know. I've spent

a lot more than I intended on this house, and I want the position to be

clear."

Old Jolyon ran his eyes unwillingly over the letter: "What he says is

clear enough," he said.

"He talks about 'a free hand,'" replied Soames.

Old Jolyon looked at him. The long-suppressed irritation and antagonism

towards this young fellow, whose affairs were beginning to intrude upon

his own, burst from him.

"Well, if you don't trust him, why do you employ him?"

Soames stole a sideway look: "It's much too late to go into that," he

said, "I only want it to be quite understood that if I give him a free

hand, he doesn't let me in. I thought if you were to speak to him, it

would carry more weight!"

"No," said old Jolyon abruptly; "I'll have nothing to do with it!"

The words of both uncle and nephew gave the impression of unspoken

meanings, far more important, behind. And the look they interchanged was

like a revelation of this consciousness.

"Well," said Soames; "I thought, for June's sake, I'd tell you, that's

all; I thought you'd better know I shan't stand any nonsense!"

"What is that to me?" old Jolyon took him up.

"Oh! I don't know," said Soames, and flurried by that sharp look he was

unable to say more. "Don't say I didn't tell you," he added sulkily,

recovering his composure.

"Tell me!" said old Jolyon; "I don't know what you mean. You come

worrying me about a thing like this. I don't want to hear about your

affairs; you must manage them yourself!"

"Very well," said Soames immovably, "I will!"

"Good-morning, then," said old Jolyon, and they parted.

Soames retraced his steps, and going into a celebrated eating-house,

asked for a plate of smoked salmon and a glass of Chablis; he seldom ate

much in the middle of the day, and generally ate standing, finding the

position beneficial to his liver, which was very sound, but to which he

desired to put down all his troubles.

When he had finished he went slowly back to his office, with bent head,

taking no notice of the swarming thousands on the pavements, who in

their turn took no notice of him.

The evening post carried the following reply to Bosinney:

'FORSYTE, BUSTARD AND FORSYTE,

'Commissioners for Oaths,

'92001, BRANCH LANE, POULTRY, E.C.,

'May 17, 1887.

'DEAR BOSINNEY,

'I have, received your letter, the terms of which not a little surprise

me. I was under the impression that you had, and have had all along, a

"free hand"; for I do not recollect that any suggestions I have been so

unfortunate as to make have met with your approval. In giving you, in

accordance with your request, this "free hand," I wish you to clearly

understand that the total cost of the house as handed over to me

completely decorated, inclusive of your fee (as arranged between us),

must not exceed twelve thousand pounds--L12,000. This gives you an ample

margin, and, as you know, is far more than I originally contemplated.

'I am,

'Yours truly,

'SOAMES FORSYTE.'

On the following day he received a note from Bosinney:

'PHILIP BAYNES BOSINNEY,

'Architect,

'309D, SLOANE STREET, S.W.,

'May 18.

'DEAR FORSYTE,

'If you think that in such a delicate matter as decoration I can bind

myself to the exact pound, I am afraid you are mistaken. I can see

that you are tired of the arrangement, and of me, and I had better,

therefore, resign.

'Yours faithfully,

'PHILIP BAYNES BOSINNEY.'

Soames pondered long and painfully over his answer, and late at night in

the dining-room, when Irene had gone to bed, he composed the following:

'62, MONTPELLIER SQUARE, S.W.,

'May 19, 1887.

'DEAR BOSINNEY,

'I think that in both our interests it would be extremely undesirable

that matters should be so left at this stage. I did not mean to say that

if you should exceed the sum named in my letter to you by ten or twenty

or even fifty pounds, there would be any difficulty between us. This

being so, I should like you to reconsider your answer. You have a "free

hand" in the terms of this correspondence, and I hope you will see your

way to completing the decorations, in the matter of which I know it is

difficult to be absolutely exact.

'Yours truly,

'SOAMES FORSYTE.'

Bosinney's answer, which came in the course of the next day, was:

'May 20.

'DEAR FORSYTE,

'Very well.

'PH. BOSINNEY.'

CHAPTER VI--OLD JOLYON AT THE ZOO

Old Jolyon disposed of his second Meeting--an ordinary Board--summarily.

He was so dictatorial that his fellow directors were left in cabal over

the increasing domineeringness of old Forsyte, which they were far from

intending to stand much longer, they said.

He went out by Underground to Portland Road Station, whence he took a

cab and drove to the Zoo.

He had an assignation there, one of those assignations that had lately

been growing more frequent, to which his increasing uneasiness about

June and the 'change in her,' as he expressed it, was driving him.

She buried herself away, and was growing thin; if he spoke to her he got

no answer, or had his head snapped off, or she looked as if she would

burst into tears. She was as changed as she could be, all through this

Bosinney. As for telling him about anything, not a bit of it!

And he would sit for long spells brooding, his paper unread before him,

a cigar extinct between his lips. She had been such a companion to him

ever since she was three years old! And he loved her so!

Forces regardless of family or class or custom were beating down his

guard; impending events over which he had no control threw their shadows

on his head. The irritation of one accustomed to have his way was roused

against he knew not what.

Chafing at the slowness of his cab, he reached the Zoo door; but, with

his sunny instinct for seizing the good of each moment, he forgot his

vexation as he walked towards the tryst.

From the stone terrace above the bear-pit his son and his two

grandchildren came hastening down when they saw old Jolyon coming, and

led him away towards the lion-house. They supported him on either side,

holding one to each of his hands,--whilst Jolly, perverse like his

father, carried his grandfather's umbrella in such a way as to catch

people's legs with the crutch of the handle.

Young Jolyon followed.

It was as good as a play to see his father with the children, but such

a play as brings smiles with tears behind. An old man and two small

children walking together can be seen at any hour of the day; but the

sight of old Jolyon, with Jolly and Holly seemed to young Jolyon a

special peep-show of the things that lie at the bottom of our hearts.

The complete surrender of that erect old figure to those little figures

on either hand was too poignantly tender, and, being a man of an

habitual reflex action, young Jolyon swore softly under his breath. The

show affected him in a way unbecoming to a Forsyte, who is nothing if

not undemonstrative.

Thus they reached the lion-house.

There had been a morning fete at the Botanical Gardens, and a large

number of Forsy...'--that is, of well-dressed people who kept carriages

had brought them on to the Zoo, so as to have more, if possible, for

their money, before going back to Rutland Gate or Bryanston Square.

"Let's go on to the Zoo," they had said to each other; "it'll be great

fun!" It was a shilling day; and there would not be all those horrid

common people.

In front of the long line of cages they were collected in rows, watching

the tawny, ravenous beasts behind the bars await their only pleasure

of the four-and-twenty hours. The hungrier the beast, the greater the

fascination. But whether because the spectators envied his appetite,

or, more humanely, because it was so soon to be satisfied, young

Jolyon could not tell. Remarks kept falling on his ears: "That's a

nasty-looking brute, that tiger!" "Oh, what a love! Look at his little

mouth!" "Yes, he's rather nice! Don't go too near, mother."

And frequently, with little pats, one or another would clap their hands

to their pockets behind and look round, as though expecting young Jolyon

or some disinterested-looking person to relieve them of the contents.

A well-fed man in a white waistcoat said slowly through his teeth: "It's

all greed; they can't be hungry. Why, they take no exercise." At these

words a tiger snatched a piece of bleeding liver, and the fat man

laughed. His wife, in a Paris model frock and gold nose-nippers,

reproved him: "How can you laugh, Harry? Such a horrid sight!"

Young Jolyon frowned.

The circumstances of his life, though he had ceased to take a too

personal view of them, had left him subject to an intermittent contempt;

and the class to which he had belonged--the carriage class--especially

excited his sarcasm.

To shut up a lion or tiger in confinement was surely a horrible

barbarity. But no cultivated person would admit this.

The idea of its being barbarous to confine wild animals had probably

never even occurred to his father for instance; he belonged to the old

school, who considered it at once humanizing and educational to confine

baboons and panthers, holding the view, no doubt, that in course of time

they might induce these creatures not so unreasonably to die of misery

and heart-sickness against the bars of their cages, and put the society

to the expense of getting others! In his eyes, as in the eyes of all

Forsytes, the pleasure of seeing these beautiful creatures in a state

of captivity far outweighed the inconvenience of imprisonment to beasts

whom God had so improvidently placed in a state of freedom! It was for

the animals good, removing them at once from the countless dangers of

open air and exercise, and enabling them to exercise their functions

in the guaranteed seclusion of a private compartment! Indeed, it was

doubtful what wild animals were made for but to be shut up in cages!

But as young Jolyon had in his constitution the elements of

impartiality, he reflected that to stigmatize as barbarity that which

was merely lack of imagination must be wrong; for none who held these

views had been placed in a similar position to the animals they caged,

and could not, therefore, be expected to enter into their sensations. It

was not until they were leaving the gardens--Jolly and Holly in a state

of blissful delirium--that old Jolyon found an opportunity of speaking

to his son on the matter next his heart. "I don't know what to make of

it," he said; "if she's to go on as she's going on now, I can't tell

what's to come. I wanted her to see the doctor, but she won't. She's not

a bit like me. She's your mother all over. Obstinate as a mule! If she

doesn't want to do a thing, she won't, and there's an end of it!"

Young Jolyon smiled; his eyes had wandered to his father's chin. 'A pair

of you,' he thought, but he said nothing.

"And then," went on old Jolyon, "there's this Bosinney. I should like to

punch the fellow's head, but I can't, I suppose, though--I don't see why

you shouldn't," he added doubtfully.

"What has he done? Far better that it should come to an end, if they

don't hit it off!"

Old Jolyon looked at his son. Now they had actually come to discuss

a subject connected with the relations between the sexes he felt

distrustful. Jo would be sure to hold some loose view or other.

"Well, I don't know what you think," he said; "I dare say your

sympathy's with him--shouldn't be surprised; but I think he's behaving

precious badly, and if he comes my way I shall tell him so." He dropped

the subject.

It was impossible to discuss with his son the true nature and meaning of

Bosinney's defection. Had not his son done the very same thing (worse,

if possible) fifteen years ago? There seemed no end to the consequences

of that piece of folly.

Young Jolyon also was silent; he had quickly penetrated his father's

thought, for, dethroned from the high seat of an obvious and

uncomplicated view of things, he had become both perceptive and subtle.

The attitude he had adopted towards sexual matters fifteen years before,

however, was too different from his father's. There was no bridging the

gulf.

He said coolly: "I suppose he's fallen in love with some other woman?"

Old Jolyon gave him a dubious look: "I can't tell," he said; "they say

so!"

"Then, it's probably true," remarked young Jolyon unexpectedly; "and I

suppose they've told you who she is?"

"Yes," said old Jolyon, "Soames's wife!"

Young Jolyon did not whistle: The circumstances of his own life had

rendered him incapable of whistling on such a subject, but he looked at

his father, while the ghost of a smile hovered over his face.

If old Jolyon saw, he took no notice.

"She and June were bosom friends!" he muttered.

"Poor little June!" said young Jolyon softly. He thought of his daughter

still as a babe of three.

Old Jolyon came to a sudden halt.

"I don't believe a word of it," he said, "it's some old woman's tale.

Get me a cab, Jo, I'm tired to death!"

They stood at a corner to see if an empty cab would come along, while

carriage after carriage drove past, bearing Forsytes of all descriptions

from the Zoo. The harness, the liveries, the gloss on the horses' coats,

shone and glittered in the May sunlight, and each equipage, landau,

sociable, barouche, Victoria, or brougham, seemed to roll out proudly

from its wheels:

'I and my horses and my men you know,' Indeed the whole turn-out have

cost a pot. But we were worth it every penny. Look At Master and at

Missis now, the dawgs! Ease with security--ah! that's the ticket!

And such, as everyone knows, is fit accompaniment for a perambulating

Forsyte.

Amongst these carriages was a barouche coming at a greater pace than

the others, drawn by a pair of bright bay horses. It swung on its high

springs, and the four people who filled it seemed rocked as in a cradle.

This chariot attracted young Jolyon's attention; and suddenly, on the

back seat, he recognised his Uncle James, unmistakable in spite of the

increased whiteness of his whiskers; opposite, their backs defended by

sunshades, Rachel Forsyte and her elder but married sister, Winifred

Dartie, in irreproachable toilettes, had posed their heads haughtily,

like two of the birds they had been seeing at the Zoo; while by James'

side reclined Dartie, in a brand-new frock-coat buttoned tight and

square, with a large expanse of carefully shot linen protruding below

each wristband.

An extra, if subdued, sparkle, an added touch of the best gloss or

varnish characterized this vehicle, and seemed to distinguish it from

all the others, as though by some happy extravagance--like that which

marks out the real 'work of art' from the ordinary 'picture'--it were

designated as the typical car, the very throne of Forsytedom.

Old Jolyon did not see them pass; he was petting poor Holly who was

tired, but those in the carriage had taken in the little group; the

ladies' heads tilted suddenly, there was a spasmodic screening movement

of parasols; James' face protruded naively, like the head of a long

bird, his mouth slowly opening. The shield-like rounds of the parasols

grew smaller and smaller, and vanished.

Young Jolyon saw that he had been recognised, even by Winifred, who

could not have been more than fifteen when he had forfeited the right to

be considered a Forsyte.

There was not much change in them! He remembered the exact look of their

turn-out all that time ago: Horses, men, carriage--all different now, no

doubt--but of the precise stamp of fifteen years before; the same neat

display, the same nicely calculated arrogance ease with security! The

swing exact, the pose of the sunshades exact, exact the spirit of the

whole thing.

And in the sunlight, defended by the haughty shields of parasols,

carriage after carriage went by.

"Uncle James has just passed, with his female folk," said young Jolyon.

His father looked black. "Did your uncle see us? Yes? Hmph! What's he

want, coming down into these parts?"

An empty cab drove up at this moment, and old Jolyon stopped it.

"I shall see you again before long, my boy!" he said. "Don't you go

paying any attention to what I've been saying about young Bosinney--I

don't believe a word of it!"

Kissing the children, who tried to detain him, he stepped in and was

borne away.

Young Jolyon, who had taken Holly up in his arms, stood motionless at

the corner, looking after the cab.

CHAPTER VII--AFTERNOON AT TIMOTHY'S

If old Jolyon, as he got into his cab, had said: 'I won't believe a word

of it!' he would more truthfully have expressed his sentiments.

The notion that James and his womankind had seen him in the company of

his son had awakened in him not only the impatience he always felt when

crossed, but that secret hostility natural between brothers, the roots

of which--little nursery rivalries--sometimes toughen and deepen as life

goes on, and, all hidden, support a plant capable of producing in season

the bitterest fruits.

Hitherto there had been between these six brothers no more unfriendly

feeling than that caused by the secret and natural doubt that the others

might be richer than themselves; a feeling increased to the pitch of

curiosity by the approach of death--that end of all handicaps--and the

great 'closeness' of their man of business, who, with some sagacity,

would profess to Nicholas ignorance of James' income, to James ignorance

of old Jolyon's, to Jolyon ignorance of Roger's, to Roger ignorance of

Swithin's, while to Swithin he would say most irritatingly that Nicholas

must be a rich man. Timothy alone was exempt, being in gilt-edged

securities.

But now, between two of them at least, had arisen a very different sense

of injury. From the moment when James had the impertinence to pry into

his affairs--as he put it--old Jolyon no longer chose to credit this

story about Bosinney. His grand-daughter slighted through a member of

'that fellow's' family! He made up his mind that Bosinney was maligned.

There must be some other reason for his defection.

June had flown out at him, or something; she was as touchy as she could

be!

He would, however, let Timothy have a bit of his mind, and see if he

would go on dropping hints! And he would not let the grass grow under

his feet either, he would go there at once, and take very good care that

he didn't have to go again on the same errand.

He saw James' carriage blocking the pavement in front of 'The Bower.' So

they had got there before him--cackling about having seen him, he dared

say! And further on, Swithin's greys were turning their noses towards

the noses of James' bays, as though in conclave over the family, while

their coachmen were in conclave above.

Old Jolyon, depositing his hat on the chair in the narrow hall, where

that hat of Bosinney's had so long ago been mistaken for a cat, passed

his thin hand grimly over his face with its great drooping white

moustaches, as though to remove all traces of expression, and made his

way upstairs.

He found the front drawing-room full. It was full enough at the best

of times--without visitors--without any one in it--for Timothy and his

sisters, following the tradition of their generation, considered that a

room was not quite 'nice' unless it was 'properly' furnished. It

held, therefore, eleven chairs, a sofa, three tables, two cabinets,

innumerable knicknacks, and part of a large grand piano. And now,

occupied by Mrs. Small, Aunt Hester, by Swithin, James, Rachel,

Winifred, Euphemia, who had come in again to return 'Passion and

Paregoric' which she had read at lunch, and her chum Frances, Roger's

daughter (the musical Forsyte, the one who composed songs), there was

only one chair left unoccupied, except, of course, the two that nobody

ever sat on--and the only standing room was occupied by the cat, on whom

old Jolyon promptly stepped.

In these days it was by no means unusual for Timothy to have so many

visitors. The family had always, one and all, had a real respect

for Aunt Ann, and now that she was gone, they were coming far more

frequently to The Bower, and staying longer.

Swithin had been the first to arrive, and seated torpid in a red satin

chair with a gilt back, he gave every appearance of lasting the others

out. And symbolizing Bosinney's name 'the big one,' with his great

stature and bulk, his thick white hair, his puffy immovable shaven face,

he looked more primeval than ever in the highly upholstered room.

His conversation, as usual of late, had turned at once upon Irene, and

he had lost no time in giving Aunts Juley and Hester his opinion with

regard to this rumour he heard was going about. No--as he said--she

might want a bit of flirtation--a pretty woman must have her fling; but

more than that he did not believe. Nothing open; she had too much good

sense, too much proper appreciation of what was due to her position, and

to the family! No sc--, he was going to say 'scandal' but the very idea

was so preposterous that he waved his hand as though to say--'but let

that pass!'

Granted that Swithin took a bachelor's view of the situation--still what

indeed was not due to that family in which so many had done so well for

themselves, had attained a certain position? If he had heard in dark,

pessimistic moments the words 'yeomen' and 'very small beer' used in

connection with his origin, did he believe them?

No! he cherished, hugging it pathetically to his bosom the secret theory

that there was something distinguished somewhere in his ancestry.

"Must be," he once said to young Jolyon, before the latter went to

the bad. "Look at us, we've got on! There must be good blood in us

somewhere."

He had been fond of young Jolyon: the boy had been in a good set at

College, had known that old ruffian Sir Charles Fiste's sons--a pretty

rascal one of them had turned out, too; and there was style about

him--it was a thousand pities he had run off with that half-foreign

governess! If he must go off like that why couldn't he have chosen

someone who would have done them credit! And what was he now?--an

underwriter at Lloyd's; they said he even painted pictures--pictures!

Damme! he might have ended as Sir Jolyon Forsyte, Bart., with a seat in

Parliament, and a place in the country!

It was Swithin who, following the impulse which sooner or later urges

thereto some member of every great family, went to the Heralds' Office,

where they assured him that he was undoubtedly of the same family as the

well-known Forsites with an 'i,' whose arms were 'three dexter buckles

on a sable ground gules,' hoping no doubt to get him to take them up.

Swithin, however, did not do this, but having ascertained that the

crest was a 'pheasant proper,' and the motto 'For Forsite,' he had

the pheasant proper placed upon his carriage and the buttons of his

coachman, and both crest and motto on his writing-paper. The arms he

hugged to himself, partly because, not having paid for them, he thought

it would look ostentatious to put them on his carriage, and he hated

ostentation, and partly because he, like any practical man all over

the country, had a secret dislike and contempt for things he could not

understand he found it hard, as anyone might, to swallow 'three dexter

buckles on a sable ground gules.'

He never forgot, however, their having told him that if he paid for them

he would be entitled to use them, and it strengthened his conviction

that he was a gentleman. Imperceptibly the rest of the family absorbed

the 'pheasant proper,' and some, more serious than others, adopted the

motto; old Jolyon, however, refused to use the latter, saying that it

was humbug meaning nothing, so far as he could see.

Among the older generation it was perhaps known at bottom from what

great historical event they derived their crest; and if pressed on the

subject, sooner than tell a lie--they did not like telling lies, having

an impression that only Frenchmen and Russians told them--they would

confess hurriedly that Swithin had got hold of it somehow.

Among the younger generation the matter was wrapped in a discretion

proper. They did not want to hurt the feelings of their elders, nor to

feel ridiculous themselves; they simply used the crest....

"No," said Swithin, "he had had an opportunity of seeing for himself,

and what he should say was, that there was nothing in her manner to that

young Buccaneer or Bosinney or whatever his name was, different from

her manner to himself; in fact, he should rather say...." But here

the entrance of Frances and Euphemia put an unfortunate stop to the

conversation, for this was not a subject which could be discussed before

young people.

And though Swithin was somewhat upset at being stopped like this on the

point of saying something important, he soon recovered his affability.

He was rather fond of Frances--Francie, as she was called in the family.

She was so smart, and they told him she made a pretty little pot of

pin-money by her songs; he called it very clever of her.

He rather prided himself indeed on a liberal attitude towards women, not

seeing any reason why they shouldn't paint pictures, or write tunes,

or books even, for the matter of that, especially if they could turn a

useful penny by it; not at all--kept them out of mischief. It was not as

if they were men!

'Little Francie,' as she was usually called with good-natured contempt,

was an important personage, if only as a standing illustration of the

attitude of Forsytes towards the Arts. She was not really 'little,' but

rather tall, with dark hair for a Forsyte, which, together with a grey

eye, gave her what was called 'a Celtic appearance.' She wrote songs

with titles like 'Breathing Sighs,' or 'Kiss me, Mother, ere I die,'

with a refrain like an anthem:

'Kiss me, Mother, ere I die;

Kiss me-kiss me, Mother, ah!

Kiss, ah! kiss me e-ere I--

Kiss me, Mother, ere I d-d-die!'

She wrote the words to them herself, and other poems. In lighter moments

she wrote waltzes, one of which, the 'Kensington Coil,' was almost

national to Kensington, having a sweet dip in it.

It was very original. Then there were her 'Songs for Little People,'

at once educational and witty, especially 'Gran'ma's Porgie,' and that

ditty, almost prophetically imbued with the coming Imperial spirit,

entitled 'Black Him In His Little Eye.'

Any publisher would take these, and reviews like 'High Living,' and

the 'Ladies' Genteel Guide' went into raptures over: 'Another of Miss

Francie Forsyte's spirited ditties, sparkling and pathetic. We ourselves

were moved to tears and laughter. Miss Forsyte should go far.'

With the true instinct of her breed, Francie had made a point of knowing

the right people--people who would write about her, and talk about her,

and people in Society, too--keeping a mental register of just where

to exert her fascinations, and an eye on that steady scale of rising

prices, which in her mind's eye represented the future. In this way she

caused herself to be universally respected.

Once, at a time when her emotions were whipped by an attachment--for

the tenor of Roger's life, with its whole-hearted collection of

house property, had induced in his only daughter a tendency towards

passion--she turned to great and sincere work, choosing the sonata form,

for the violin. This was the only one of her productions that troubled

the Forsytes. They felt at once that it would not sell.

Roger, who liked having a clever daughter well enough, and often alluded

to the amount of pocket-money she made for herself, was upset by this

violin sonata.

"Rubbish like that!" he called it. Francie had borrowed young

Flageoletti from Euphemia, to play it in the drawing-room at Prince's

Gardens.

As a matter of fact Roger was right. It was rubbish, but--annoying! the

sort of rubbish that wouldn't sell. As every Forsyte knows, rubbish that

sells is not rubbish at all--far from it.

And yet, in spite of the sound common sense which fixed the worth of art

at what it would fetch, some of the Forsytes--Aunt Hester, for instance,

who had always been musical--could not help regretting that Francie's

music was not 'classical'; the same with her poems. But then, as Aunt

Hester said, they didn't see any poetry nowadays, all the poems were

'little light things.'

There was nobody who could write a poem like 'Paradise Lost,' or

'Childe Harold'; either of which made you feel that you really had read

something. Still, it was nice for Francie to have something to occupy

her; while other girls were spending money shopping she was making it!

And both Aunt Hester and Aunt Juley were always ready to listen to the

latest story of how Francie had got her price increased.

They listened now, together with Swithin, who sat pretending not to, for

these young people talked so fast and mumbled so, he never could catch

what they said.

"And I can't think," said Mrs. Septimus, "how you do it. I should never

have the audacity!"

Francie smiled lightly. "I'd much rather deal with a man than a woman.

Women are so sharp!"

"My dear," cried Mrs. Small, "I'm sure we're not."

Euphemia went off into her silent laugh, and, ending with the squeak,

said, as though being strangled: "Oh, you'll kill me some day, auntie."

Swithin saw no necessity to laugh; he detested people laughing when he

himself perceived no joke. Indeed, he detested Euphemia altogether, to

whom he always alluded as 'Nick's daughter, what's she called--the pale

one?' He had just missed being her god-father--indeed, would have been,

had he not taken a firm stand against her outlandish name. He hated

becoming a godfather. Swithin then said to Francie with dignity: "It's

a fine day--er--for the time of year." But Euphemia, who knew perfectly

well that he had refused to be her godfather, turned to Aunt Hester, and

began telling her how she had seen Irene--Mrs. Soames--at the Church and

Commercial Stores.

"And Soames was with her?" said Aunt Hester, to whom Mrs. Small had as

yet had no opportunity of relating the incident.

"Soames with her? Of course not!"

"But was she all alone in London?"

"Oh, no; there was Mr. Bosinney with her. She was perfectly dressed."

But Swithin, hearing the name Irene, looked severely at Euphemia, who,

it is true, never did look well in a dress, whatever she may have done

on other occasions, and said:

"Dressed like a lady, I've no doubt. It's a pleasure to see her."

At this moment James and his daughters were announced. Dartie, feeling

badly in want of a drink, had pleaded an appointment with his dentist,

and, being put down at the Marble Arch, had got into a hansom, and was

already seated in the window of his club in Piccadilly.

His wife, he told his cronies, had wanted to take him to pay some calls.

It was not in his line--not exactly. Haw!

Hailing the waiter, he sent him out to the hall to see what had won

the 4.30 race. He was dog-tired, he said, and that was a fact; had been

drivin' about with his wife to 'shows' all the afternoon. Had put his

foot down at last. A fellow must live his own life.

At this moment, glancing out of the bay window--for he loved this seat

whence he could see everybody pass--his eye unfortunately, or perhaps

fortunately, chanced to light on the figure of Soames, who was mousing

across the road from the Green Park-side, with the evident intention of

coming in, for he, too, belonged to 'The Iseeum.'

Dartie sprang to his feet; grasping his glass, he muttered something

about 'that 4.30 race,' and swiftly withdrew to the card-room, where

Soames never came. Here, in complete isolation and a dim light, he lived

his own life till half past seven, by which hour he knew Soames must

certainly have left the club.

It would not do, as he kept repeating to himself whenever he felt the

impulse to join the gossips in the bay-window getting too strong for

him--it absolutely would not do, with finances as low as his, and the

'old man' (James) rusty ever since that business over the oil shares,

which was no fault of his, to risk a row with Winifred.

If Soames were to see him in the club it would be sure to come round to

her that he wasn't at the dentist's at all. He never knew a family where

things 'came round' so. Uneasily, amongst the green baize card-tables,

a frown on his olive coloured face, his check trousers crossed, and

patent-leather boots shining through the gloom, he sat biting his

forefinger, and wondering where the deuce he was to get the money if

Erotic failed to win the Lancashire Cup.

His thoughts turned gloomily to the Forsytes. What a set they were!

There was no getting anything out of them--at least, it was a matter of

extreme difficulty. They were so d---d particular about money matters;

not a sportsman amongst the lot, unless it were George. That fellow

Soames, for instance, would have a fit if you tried to borrow a tenner

from him, or, if he didn't have a fit, he looked at you with his cursed

supercilious smile, as if you were a lost soul because you were in want

of money.

And that wife of his (Dartie's mouth watered involuntarily), he had

tried to be on good terms with her, as one naturally would with any

pretty sister-in-law, but he would be cursed if the (he mentally used

a coarse word)--would have anything to say to him--she looked at him,

indeed, as if he were dirt--and yet she could go far enough, he wouldn't

mind betting. He knew women; they weren't made with soft eyes and

figures like that for nothing, as that fellow Soames would jolly

soon find out, if there were anything in what he had heard about this

Buccaneer Johnny.

Rising from his chair, Dartie took a turn across the room, ending in

front of the looking-glass over the marble chimney-piece; and there he

stood for a long time contemplating in the glass the reflection of his

face. It had that look, peculiar to some men, of having been steeped in

linseed oil, with its waxed dark moustaches and the little distinguished

commencements of side whiskers; and concernedly he felt the promise of a

pimple on the side of his slightly curved and fattish nose.

In the meantime old Jolyon had found the remaining chair in Timothy's

commodious drawing-room. His advent had obviously put a stop to the

conversation, decided awkwardness having set in. Aunt Juley, with her

well-known kindheartedness, hastened to set people at their ease again.

"Yes, Jolyon," she said, "we were just saying that you haven't been here

for a long time; but we mustn't be surprised. You're busy, of course?

James was just saying what a busy time of year...."

"Was he?" said old Jolyon, looking hard at James. "It wouldn't be half

so busy if everybody minded their own business."

James, brooding in a small chair from which his knees ran uphill,

shifted his feet uneasily, and put one of them down on the cat, which

had unwisely taken refuge from old Jolyon beside him.

"Here, you've got a cat here," he said in an injured voice, withdrawing

his foot nervously as he felt it squeezing into the soft, furry body.

"Several," said old Jolyon, looking at one face and another; "I trod on

one just now."

A silence followed.

Then Mrs. Small, twisting her fingers and gazing round with 'pathetic

calm', asked: "And how is dear June?"

A twinkle of humour shot through the sternness of old Jolyon's eyes.

Extraordinary old woman, Juley! No one quite like her for saying the

wrong thing!

"Bad!" he said; "London don't agree with her--too many people about, too

much clatter and chatter by half." He laid emphasis on the words, and

again looked James in the face.

Nobody spoke.

A feeling of its being too dangerous to take a step in any direction, or

hazard any remark, had fallen on them all. Something of the sense of the

impending, that comes over the spectator of a Greek tragedy, had entered

that upholstered room, filled with those white-haired, frock-coated

old men, and fashionably attired women, who were all of the same blood,

between all of whom existed an unseizable resemblance.

Not that they were conscious of it--the visits of such fateful, bitter

spirits are only felt.

Then Swithin rose. He would not sit there, feeling like that--he was

not to be put down by anyone! And, manoeuvring round the room with added

pomp, he shook hands with each separately.

"You tell Timothy from me," he said, "that he coddles himself too much!"

Then, turning to Francie, whom he considered 'smart,' he added: "You

come with me for a drive one of these days." But this conjured up the

vision of that other eventful drive which had been so much talked about,

and he stood quite still for a second, with glassy eyes, as though

waiting to catch up with the significance of what he himself had said;

then, suddenly recollecting that he didn't care a damn, he turned to

old Jolyon: "Well, good-bye, Jolyon! You shouldn't go about without an

overcoat; you'll be getting sciatica or something!" And, kicking the cat

slightly with the pointed tip of his patent leather boot, he took his

huge form away.

When he had gone everyone looked secretly at the others, to see how they

had taken the mention of the word 'drive'--the word which had

become famous, and acquired an overwhelming importance, as the only

official--so to speak--news in connection with the vague and sinister

rumour clinging to the family tongue.

Euphemia, yielding to an impulse, said with a short laugh: "I'm glad

Uncle Swithin doesn't ask me to go for drives."

Mrs. Small, to reassure her and smooth over any little awkwardness the

subject might have, replied: "My dear, he likes to take somebody well

dressed, who will do him a little credit. I shall never forget the drive

he took me. It was an experience!" And her chubby round old face was

spread for a moment with a strange contentment; then broke into pouts,

and tears came into her eyes. She was thinking of that long ago driving

tour she had once taken with Septimus Small.

James, who had relapsed into his nervous brooding in the little chair,

suddenly roused himself: "He's a funny fellow, Swithin," he said, but in

a half-hearted way.

Old Jolyon's silence, his stern eyes, held them all in a kind of

paralysis. He was disconcerted himself by the effect of his own

words--an effect which seemed to deepen the importance of the very

rumour he had come to scotch; but he was still angry.

He had not done with them yet--No, no--he would give them another rub or

two.

He did not wish to rub his nieces, he had no quarrel with them--a young

and presentable female always appealed to old Jolyon's clemency--but

that fellow James, and, in a less degree perhaps, those others, deserved

all they would get. And he, too, asked for Timothy.

As though feeling that some danger threatened her younger brother, Aunt

Juley suddenly offered him tea: "There it is," she said, "all cold and

nasty, waiting for you in the back drawing room, but Smither shall make

you some fresh."

Old Jolyon rose: "Thank you," he said, looking straight at James, "but

I've no time for tea, and--scandal, and the rest of it! It's time I was

at home. Good-bye, Julia; good-bye, Hester; good-bye, Winifred."

Without more ceremonious adieux, he marched out.

Once again in his cab, his anger evaporated, for so it ever was with

his wrath--when he had rapped out, it was gone. Sadness came over his

spirit. He had stopped their mouths, maybe, but at what a cost! At the

cost of certain knowledge that the rumour he had been resolved not to

believe was true. June was abandoned, and for the wife of that fellow's

son! He felt it was true, and hardened himself to treat it as if it were

not; but the pain he hid beneath this resolution began slowly, surely,

to vent itself in a blind resentment against James and his son.

The six women and one man left behind in the little drawing-room began

talking as easily as might be after such an occurrence, for though each

one of them knew for a fact that he or she never talked scandal, each

one of them also knew that the other six did; all were therefore angry

and at a loss. James only was silent, disturbed, to the bottom of his

soul.

Presently Francie said: "Do you know, I think Uncle Jolyon is terribly

changed this last year. What do you think, Aunt Hester?"

Aunt Hester made a little movement of recoil: "Oh, ask your Aunt Julia!"

she said; "I know nothing about it."

No one else was afraid of assenting, and James muttered gloomily at the

floor: "He's not half the man he was."

"I've noticed it a long time," went on Francie; "he's aged

tremendously."

Aunt Juley shook her head; her face seemed suddenly to have become one

immense pout.

"Poor dear Jolyon," she said, "somebody ought to see to it for him!"

There was again silence; then, as though in terror of being left

solitarily behind, all five visitors rose simultaneously, and took their

departure.

Mrs. Small, Aunt Hester, and their cat were left once more alone,

the sound of a door closing in the distance announced the approach of

Timothy.

That evening, when Aunt Hester had just got off to sleep in the back

bedroom that used to be Aunt Juley's before Aunt Juley took Aunt Ann's,

her door was opened, and Mrs. Small, in a pink night-cap, a candle in

her hand, entered: "Hester!" she said. "Hester!"

Aunt Hester faintly rustled the sheet.

"Hester," repeated Aunt Juley, to make quite sure that she had awakened

her, "I am quite troubled about poor dear Jolyon. What," Aunt Juley

dwelt on the word, "do you think ought to be done?"

Aunt Hester again rustled the sheet, her voice was heard faintly

pleading: "Done? How should I know?"

Aunt Juley turned away satisfied, and closing the door with extra

gentleness so as not to disturb dear Hester, let it slip through her

fingers and fall to with a 'crack.'

Back in her own room, she stood at the window gazing at the moon over

the trees in the Park, through a chink in the muslin curtains, close

drawn lest anyone should see. And there, with her face all round and

pouting in its pink cap, and her eyes wet, she thought of 'dear Jolyon,'

so old and so lonely, and how she could be of some use to him; and how

he would come to love her, as she had never been loved since--since poor

Septimus went away.

CHAPTER VIII--DANCE AT ROGER'S

Roger's house in Prince's Gardens was brilliantly alight. Large numbers

of wax candles had been collected and placed in cut-glass chandeliers,

and the parquet floor of the long, double drawing-room reflected these

constellations. An appearance of real spaciousness had been secured by

moving out all the furniture on to the upper landings, and enclosing

the room with those strange appendages of civilization known as 'rout'

seats. In a remote corner, embowered in palms, was a cottage piano, with

a copy of the 'Kensington Coil' open on the music-stand.

Roger had objected to a band. He didn't see in the least what they

wanted with a band; he wouldn't go to the expense, and there was an end

of it. Francie (her mother, whom Roger had long since reduced to chronic

dyspepsia, went to bed on such occasions), had been obliged to content

herself with supplementing the piano by a young man who played the

cornet, and she so arranged with palms that anyone who did not look into

the heart of things might imagine there were several musicians secreted

there. She made up her mind to tell them to play loud--there was a lot

of music in a cornet, if the man would only put his soul into it.

In the more cultivated American tongue, she was 'through' at

last--through that tortuous labyrinth of make-shifts, which must be

traversed before fashionable display can be combined with the sound

economy of a Forsyte. Thin but brilliant, in her maize-coloured frock

with much tulle about the shoulders, she went from place to place,

fitting on her gloves, and casting her eye over it all.

To the hired butler (for Roger only kept maids) she spoke about the

wine. Did he quite understand that Mr. Forsyte wished a dozen bottles of

the champagne from Whiteley's to be put out? But if that were finished

(she did not suppose it would be, most of the ladies would drink water,

no doubt), but if it were, there was the champagne cup, and he must do

the best he could with that.

She hated having to say this sort of thing to a butler, it was so infra

dig.; but what could you do with father? Roger, indeed, after making

himself consistently disagreeable about the dance, would come down

presently, with his fresh colour and bumpy forehead, as though he had

been its promoter; and he would smile, and probably take the prettiest

woman in to supper; and at two o'clock, just as they were getting into

the swing, he would go up secretly to the musicians and tell them to

play 'God Save the Queen,' and go away.

Francie devoutly hoped he might soon get tired, and slip off to bed.

The three or four devoted girl friends who were staying in the house for

this dance had partaken with her, in a small, abandoned room upstairs,

of tea and cold chicken-legs, hurriedly served; the men had been sent

out to dine at Eustace's Club, it being felt that they must be fed up.

Punctually on the stroke of nine arrived Mrs. Small alone. She made

elaborate apologies for the absence of Timothy, omitting all mention

of Aunt Hester, who, at the last minute, had said she could not be

bothered. Francie received her effusively, and placed her on a rout

seat, where she left her, pouting and solitary in lavender-coloured

satin--the first time she had worn colour since Aunt Ann's death.

The devoted maiden friends came now from their rooms, each by magic

arrangement in a differently coloured frock, but all with the same

liberal allowance of tulle on the shoulders and at the bosom--for they

were, by some fatality, lean to a girl. They were all taken up to Mrs.

Small. None stayed with her more than a few seconds, but clustering

together talked and twisted their programmes, looking secretly at the

door for the first appearance of a man.

Then arrived in a group a number of Nicholases, always punctual--the

fashion up Ladbroke Grove way; and close behind them Eustace and his

men, gloomy and smelling rather of smoke.

Three or four of Francie's lovers now appeared, one after the other;

she had made each promise to come early. They were all clean-shaven and

sprightly, with that peculiar kind of young-man sprightliness which

had recently invaded Kensington; they did not seem to mind each other's

presence in the least, and wore their ties bunching out at the ends,

white waistcoats, and socks with clocks. All had handkerchiefs concealed

in their cuffs. They moved buoyantly, each armoured in professional

gaiety, as though he had come to do great deeds. Their faces when they

danced, far from wearing the traditional solemn look of the dancing

Englishman, were irresponsible, charming, suave; they bounded, twirling

their partners at great pace, without pedantic attention to the rhythm

of the music.

At other dancers they looked with a kind of airy scorn--they, the light

brigade, the heroes of a hundred Kensington 'hops'--from whom alone

could the right manner and smile and step be hoped.

After this the stream came fast; chaperones silting up along the wall

facing the entrance, the volatile element swelling the eddy in the

larger room.

Men were scarce, and wallflowers wore their peculiar, pathetic

expression, a patient, sourish smile which seemed to say: "Oh, no! don't

mistake me, I know you are not coming up to me. I can hardly expect

that!" And Francie would plead with one of her lovers, or with some

callow youth: "Now, to please me, do let me introduce you to Miss Pink;

such a nice girl, really!" and she would bring him up, and say: "Miss

Pink--Mr. Gathercole. Can you spare him a dance?" Then Miss Pink,

smiling her forced smile, colouring a little, answered: "Oh! I think

so!" and screening her empty card, wrote on it the name of Gathercole,

spelling it passionately in the district that he proposed, about the

second extra.

But when the youth had murmured that it was hot, and passed, she

relapsed into her attitude of hopeless expectation, into her patient,

sourish smile.

Mothers, slowly fanning their faces, watched their daughters, and in

their eyes could be read all the story of those daughters' fortunes. As

for themselves, to sit hour after hour, dead tired, silent, or talking

spasmodically--what did it matter, so long as the girls were having a

good time! But to see them neglected and passed by! Ah! they smiled,

but their eyes stabbed like the eyes of an offended swan; they longed to

pluck young Gathercole by the slack of his dandified breeches, and drag

him to their daughters--the jackanapes!

And all the cruelties and hardness of life, its pathos and unequal

chances, its conceit, self-forgetfulness, and patience, were presented

on the battle-field of this Kensington ball-room.

Here and there, too, lovers--not lovers like Francie's, a peculiar

breed, but simply lovers--trembling, blushing, silent, sought each other

by flying glances, sought to meet and touch in the mazes of the dance,

and now and again dancing together, struck some beholder by the light in

their eyes.

Not a second before ten o'clock came the Jameses--Emily, Rachel,

Winifred (Dartie had been left behind, having on a former occasion drunk

too much of Roger's champagne), and Cicely, the youngest, making her

debut; behind them, following in a hansom from the paternal mansion

where they had dined, Soames and Irene.

All these ladies had shoulder-straps and no tulle--thus showing at once,

by a bolder exposure of flesh, that they came from the more fashionable

side of the Park.

Soames, sidling back from the contact of the dancers, took up a position

against the wall. Guarding himself with his pale smile, he stood

watching. Waltz after waltz began and ended, couple after couple brushed

by with smiling lips, laughter, and snatches of talk; or with set lips,

and eyes searching the throng; or again, with silent, parted lips, and

eyes on each other. And the scent of festivity, the odour of flowers,

and hair, of essences that women love, rose suffocatingly in the heat of

the summer night.

Silent, with something of scorn in his smile, Soames seemed to notice

nothing; but now and again his eyes, finding that which they sought,

would fix themselves on a point in the shifting throng, and the smile

die off his lips.

He danced with no one. Some fellows danced with their wives; his sense

of 'form' had never permitted him to dance with Irene since their

marriage, and the God of the Forsytes alone can tell whether this was a

relief to him or not.

She passed, dancing with other men, her dress, iris-coloured, floating

away from her feet. She danced well; he was tired of hearing women say

with an acid smile: "How beautifully your wife dances, Mr. Forsyte--it's

quite a pleasure to watch her!" Tired of answering them with his

sidelong glance: "You think so?"

A young couple close by flirted a fan by turns, making an unpleasant

draught. Francie and one of her lovers stood near. They were talking of

love.

He heard Roger's voice behind, giving an order about supper to a

servant. Everything was very second-class! He wished that he had not

come! He had asked Irene whether she wanted him; she had answered with

that maddening smile of hers "Oh, no!"

Why had he come? For the last quarter of an hour he had not even seen

her. Here was George advancing with his Quilpish face; it was too late

to get out of his way.

"Have you seen 'The Buccaneer'?" said this licensed wag; "he's on the

warpath--hair cut and everything!"

Soames said he had not, and crossing the room, half-empty in an interval

of the dance, he went out on the balcony, and looked down into the

street.

A carriage had driven up with late arrivals, and round the door hung

some of those patient watchers of the London streets who spring up to

the call of light or music; their faces, pale and upturned above their

black and rusty figures, had an air of stolid watching that annoyed

Soames. Why were they allowed to hang about; why didn't the bobby move

them on?

But the policeman took no notice of them; his feet were planted apart

on the strip of crimson carpet stretched across the pavement; his face,

under the helmet, wore the same stolid, watching look as theirs.

Across the road, through the railings, Soames could see the branches

of trees shining, faintly stirring in the breeze, by the gleam of the

street lamps; beyond, again, the upper lights of the houses on the other

side, so many eyes looking down on the quiet blackness of the garden;

and over all, the sky, that wonderful London sky, dusted with the

innumerable reflection of countless lamps; a dome woven over between

its stars with the refraction of human needs and human fancies--immense

mirror of pomp and misery that night after night stretches its kindly

mocking over miles of houses and gardens, mansions and squalor, over

Forsytes, policemen, and patient watchers in the streets.

Soames turned away, and, hidden in the recess, gazed into the lighted

room. It was cooler out there. He saw the new arrivals, June and her

grandfather, enter. What had made them so late? They stood by the

doorway. They looked fagged. Fancy Uncle Jolyon turning out at this

time of night! Why hadn't June come to Irene, as she usually did, and

it occurred to him suddenly that he had seen nothing of June for a long

time now.

Watching her face with idle malice, he saw it change, grow so pale that

he thought she would drop, then flame out crimson. Turning to see at

what she was looking, he saw his wife on Bosinney's arm, coming from

the conservatory at the end of the room. Her eyes were raised to his,

as though answering some question he had asked, and he was gazing at her

intently.

Soames looked again at June. Her hand rested on old Jolyon's arm; she

seemed to be making a request. He saw a surprised look on his uncle's

face; they turned and passed through the door out of his sight.

The music began again--a waltz--and, still as a statue in the recess of

the window, his face unmoved, but no smile on his lips, Soames waited.

Presently, within a yard of the dark balcony, his wife and Bosinney

passed. He caught the perfume of the gardenias that she wore, saw the

rise and fall of her bosom, the languor in her eyes, her parted lips,

and a look on her face that he did not know. To the slow, swinging

measure they danced by, and it seemed to him that they clung to each

other; he saw her raise her eyes, soft and dark, to Bosinney's, and drop

them again.

Very white, he turned back to the balcony, and leaning on it, gazed down

on the Square; the figures were still there looking up at the light with

dull persistency, the policeman's face, too, upturned, and staring, but

he saw nothing of them. Below, a carriage drew up, two figures got in,

and drove away....

That evening June and old Jolyon sat down to dinner at the usual hour.

The girl was in her customary high-necked frock, old Jolyon had not

dressed.

At breakfast she had spoken of the dance at Uncle Roger's, she wanted to

go; she had been stupid enough, she said, not to think of asking anyone

to take her. It was too late now.

Old Jolyon lifted his keen eyes. June was used to go to dances with

Irene as a matter of course! and deliberately fixing his gaze on her, he

asked: "Why don't you get Irene?"

No! June did not want to ask Irene; she would only go if--if her

grandfather wouldn't mind just for once for a little time!

At her look, so eager and so worn, old Jolyon had grumblingly consented.

He did not know what she wanted, he said, with going to a dance like

this, a poor affair, he would wager; and she no more fit for it than a

cat! What she wanted was sea air, and after his general meeting of the

Globular Gold Concessions he was ready to take her. She didn't want to

go away? Ah! she would knock herself up! Stealing a mournful look at

her, he went on with his breakfast.

June went out early, and wandered restlessly about in the heat. Her

little light figure that lately had moved so languidly about its

business, was all on fire. She bought herself some flowers. She

wanted--she meant to look her best. He would be there! She knew well

enough that he had a card. She would show him that she did not care. But

deep down in her heart she resolved that evening to win him back. She

came in flushed, and talked brightly all lunch; old Jolyon was there,

and he was deceived.

In the afternoon she was overtaken by a desperate fit of sobbing. She

strangled the noise against the pillows of her bed, but when at last

it ceased she saw in the glass a swollen face with reddened eyes, and

violet circles round them. She stayed in the darkened room till dinner

time.

All through that silent meal the struggle went on within her.

She looked so shadowy and exhausted that old Jolyon told 'Sankey' to

countermand the carriage, he would not have her going out.... She was to

go to bed! She made no resistance. She went up to her room, and sat in

the dark. At ten o'clock she rang for her maid.

"Bring some hot water, and go down and tell Mr. Forsyte that I feel

perfectly rested. Say that if he's too tired I can go to the dance by

myself."

The maid looked askance, and June turned on her imperiously. "Go," she

said, "bring the hot water at once!"

Her ball-dress still lay on the sofa, and with a sort of fierce care she

arrayed herself, took the flowers in her hand, and went down, her small

face carried high under its burden of hair. She could hear old Jolyon in

his room as she passed.

Bewildered and vexed, he was dressing. It was past ten, they would not

get there till eleven; the girl was mad. But he dared not cross her--the

expression of her face at dinner haunted him.

With great ebony brushes he smoothed his hair till it shone like silver

under the light; then he, too, came out on the gloomy staircase.

June met him below, and, without a word, they went to the carriage.

When, after that drive which seemed to last for ever, she entered

Roger's drawing-room, she disguised under a mask of resolution a very

torment of nervousness and emotion. The feeling of shame at what might

be called 'running after him' was smothered by the dread that he might

not be there, that she might not see him after all, and by that dogged

resolve--somehow, she did not know how--to win him back.

The sight of the ballroom, with its gleaming floor, gave her a feeling

of joy, of triumph, for she loved dancing, and when dancing she floated,

so light was she, like a strenuous, eager little spirit. He would surely

ask her to dance, and if he danced with her it would all be as it was

before. She looked about her eagerly.

The sight of Bosinney coming with Irene from the conservatory, with that

strange look of utter absorption on his face, struck her too suddenly.

They had not seen--no one should see--her distress, not even her

grandfather.

She put her hand on Jolyon's arm, and said very low:

"I must go home, Gran; I feel ill."

He hurried her away, grumbling to himself that he had known how it would

be.

To her he said nothing; only when they were once more in the carriage,

which by some fortunate chance had lingered near the door, he asked her:

"What is it, my darling?"

Feeling her whole slender body shaken by sobs, he was terribly alarmed.

She must have Blank to-morrow. He would insist upon it. He could not

have her like this.... There, there!

June mastered her sobs, and squeezing his hand feverishly, she lay back

in her corner, her face muffled in a shawl.

He could only see her eyes, fixed and staring in the dark, but he did

not cease to stroke her hand with his thin fingers.

CHAPTER IX--EVENING AT RICHMOND

Other eyes besides the eyes of June and of Soames had seen 'those

two' (as Euphemia had already begun to call them) coming from the

conservatory; other eyes had noticed the look on Bosinney's face.

There are moments when Nature reveals the passion hidden beneath the

careless calm of her ordinary moods--violent spring flashing white on

almond-blossom through the purple clouds; a snowy, moonlit peak, with

its single star, soaring up to the passionate blue; or against the

flames of sunset, an old yew-tree standing dark guardian of some fiery

secret.

There are moments, too, when in a picture-gallery, a work, noted by the

casual spectator as '......Titian--remarkably fine,' breaks through the

defences of some Forsyte better lunched perhaps than his fellows,

and holds him spellbound in a kind of ecstasy. There are things, he

feels--there are things here which--well, which are things. Something

unreasoning, unreasonable, is upon him; when he tries to define it with

the precision of a practical man, it eludes him, slips away, as the

glow of the wine he has drunk is slipping away, leaving him cross, and

conscious of his liver. He feels that he has been extravagant, prodigal

of something; virtue has gone out of him. He did not desire this glimpse

of what lay under the three stars of his catalogue. God forbid that

he should know anything about the forces of Nature! God forbid that he

should admit for a moment that there are such things! Once admit that,

and where was he? One paid a shilling for entrance, and another for the

programme.

The look which June had seen, which other Forsytes had seen, was like

the sudden flashing of a candle through a hole in some imaginary canvas,

behind which it was being moved--the sudden flaming-out of a vague,

erratic glow, shadowy and enticing. It brought home to onlookers the

consciousness that dangerous forces were at work. For a moment they

noticed it with pleasure, with interest, then felt they must not notice

it at all.

It supplied, however, the reason of June's coming so late and

disappearing again without dancing, without even shaking hands with her

lover. She was ill, it was said, and no wonder.

But here they looked at each other guiltily. They had no desire to

spread scandal, no desire to be ill-natured. Who would have? And to

outsiders no word was breathed, unwritten law keeping them silent.

Then came the news that June had gone to the seaside with old Jolyon.

He had carried her off to Broadstairs, for which place there was just

then a feeling, Yarmouth having lost caste, in spite of Nicholas, and no

Forsyte going to the sea without intending to have an air for his money

such as would render him bilious in a week. That fatally aristocratic

tendency of the first Forsyte to drink Madeira had left his descendants

undoubtedly accessible.

So June went to the sea. The family awaited developments; there was

nothing else to do.

But how far--how far had 'those two' gone? How far were they going to

go? Could they really be going at all? Nothing could surely come of it,

for neither of them had any money. At the most a flirtation, ending, as

all such attachments should, at the proper time.

Soames' sister, Winifred Dartie, who had imbibed with the breezes of

Mayfair--she lived in Green Street--more fashionable principles in

regard to matrimonial behaviour than were current, for instance, in

Ladbroke Grove, laughed at the idea of there being anything in it. The

'little thing'--Irene was taller than herself, and it was real testimony

to the solid worth of a Forsyte that she should always thus be a 'little

thing'--the little thing was bored. Why shouldn't she amuse herself?

Soames was rather tiring; and as to Mr. Bosinney--only that buffoon

George would have called him the Buccaneer--she maintained that he was

very chic.

This dictum--that Bosinney was chic--caused quite a sensation. It failed

to convince. That he was 'good-looking in a way' they were prepared to

admit, but that anyone could call a man with his pronounced cheekbones,

curious eyes, and soft felt hats chic was only another instance of

Winifred's extravagant way of running after something new.

It was that famous summer when extravagance was fashionable, when the

very earth was extravagant, chestnut-trees spread with blossom, and

flowers drenched in perfume, as they had never been before; when roses

blew in every garden; and for the swarming stars the nights had hardly

space; when every day and all day long the sun, in full armour, swung

his brazen shield above the Park, and people did strange things,

lunching and dining in the open air. Unprecedented was the tale of cabs

and carriages that streamed across the bridges of the shining river,

bearing the upper-middle class in thousands to the green glories of

Bushey, Richmond, Kew, and Hampton Court. Almost every family with any

pretensions to be of the carriage-class paid one visit that year to

the horse-chestnuts at Bushey, or took one drive amongst the Spanish

chestnuts of Richmond Park. Bowling smoothly, if dustily, along, in

a cloud of their own creation, they would stare fashionably at the

antlered heads which the great slow deer raised out of a forest of

bracken that promised to autumn lovers such cover as was never seen

before. And now and again, as the amorous perfume of chestnut flowers

and of fern was drifted too near, one would say to the other: "My dear!

What a peculiar scent!"

And the lime-flowers that year were of rare prime, near honey-coloured.

At the corners of London squares they gave out, as the sun went down, a

perfume sweeter than the honey bees had taken--a perfume that stirred a

yearning unnamable in the hearts of Forsytes and their peers, taking the

cool after dinner in the precincts of those gardens to which they alone

had keys.

And that yearning made them linger amidst the dim shapes of flower-beds

in the failing daylight, made them turn, and turn, and turn again, as

though lovers were waiting for them--waiting for the last light to die

away under the shadow of the branches.

Some vague sympathy evoked by the scent of the limes, some sisterly

desire to see for herself, some idea of demonstrating the soundness

of her dictum that there was 'nothing in it'; or merely the craving to

drive down to Richmond, irresistible that summer, moved the mother of

the little Darties (of little Publius, of Imogen, Maud, and Benedict) to

write the following note to her sister-in-law:

'DEAR IRENE, 'June 30.

'I hear that Soames is going to Henley tomorrow for the night. I thought

it would be great fun if we made up a little party and drove down to,

Richmond. Will you ask Mr. Bosinney, and I will get young Flippard.

'Emily (they called their mother Emily--it was so chic) will lend us the

carriage. I will call for you and your young man at seven o'clock.

'Your affectionate sister,

'WINIFRED DARTIE.

'Montague believes the dinner at the Crown and Sceptre to be quite

eatable.'

Montague was Dartie's second and better known name--his first being

Moses; for he was nothing if not a man of the world.

Her plan met with more opposition from Providence than so benevolent a

scheme deserved. In the first place young Flippard wrote:

'DEAR Mrs. DARTIE,

'Awfully sorry. Engaged two deep.

'Yours,

'AUGUSTUS FLIPPARD.'

It was late to send into the by-ways and hedges to remedy this

misfortune. With the promptitude and conduct of a mother, Winifred

fell back on her husband. She had, indeed, the decided but tolerant

temperament that goes with a good deal of profile, fair hair, and

greenish eyes. She was seldom or never at a loss; or if at a loss, was

always able to convert it into a gain.

Dartie, too, was in good feather. Erotic had failed to win the

Lancashire Cup. Indeed, that celebrated animal, owned as he was by a

pillar of the turf, who had secretly laid many thousands against him,

had not even started. The forty-eight hours that followed his scratching

were among the darkest in Dartie's life.

Visions of James haunted him day and night. Black thoughts about Soames

mingled with the faintest hopes. On the Friday night he got drunk, so

greatly was he affected. But on Saturday morning the true Stock

Exchange instinct triumphed within him. Owing some hundreds, which by

no possibility could he pay, he went into town and put them all on

Concertina for the Saltown Borough Handicap.

As he said to Major Scrotton, with whom he lunched at the Iseeum: "That

little Jew boy, Nathans, had given him the tip. He didn't care a cursh.

He wash in--a mucker. If it didn't come up--well then, damme, the old

man would have to pay!"

A bottle of Pol Roger to his own cheek had given him a new contempt for

James.

It came up. Concertina was squeezed home by her neck--a terrible squeak!

But, as Dartie said: There was nothing like pluck!

He was by no means averse to the expedition to Richmond. He would

'stand' it himself! He cherished an admiration for Irene, and wished to

be on more playful terms with her.

At half-past five the Park Lane footman came round to say: Mrs. Forsyte

was very sorry, but one of the horses was coughing!

Undaunted by this further blow, Winifred at once despatched little

Publius (now aged seven) with the nursery governess to Montpellier

Square.

They would go down in hansoms and meet at the Crown and Sceptre at 7.45.

Dartie, on being told, was pleased enough. It was better than going down

with your back to the horses! He had no objection to driving down with

Irene. He supposed they would pick up the others at Montpellier Square,

and swop hansoms there?

Informed that the meet was at the Crown and Sceptre, and that he would

have to drive with his wife, he turned sulky, and said it was d---d

slow!

At seven o'clock they started, Dartie offering to bet the driver

half-a-crown he didn't do it in the three-quarters of an hour.

Twice only did husband and wife exchange remarks on the way.

Dartie said: "It'll put Master Soames's nose out of joint to hear his

wife's been drivin' in a hansom with Master Bosinney!"

Winifred replied: "Don't talk such nonsense, Monty!"

"Nonsense!" repeated Dartie. "You don't know women, my fine lady!"

On the other occasion he merely asked: "How am I looking? A bit puffy

about the gills? That fizz old George is so fond of is a windy wine!"

He had been lunching with George Forsyte at the Haversnake.

Bosinney and Irene had arrived before them. They were standing in one of

the long French windows overlooking the river.

Windows that summer were open all day long, and all night too, and day

and night the scents of flowers and trees came in, the hot scent of

parching grass, and the cool scent of the heavy dews.

To the eye of the observant Dartie his two guests did not appear to

be making much running, standing there close together, without a word.

Bosinney was a hungry-looking creature--not much go about him.

He left them to Winifred, however, and busied himself to order the

dinner.

A Forsyte will require good, if not delicate feeding, but a Dartie will

tax the resources of a Crown and Sceptre. Living as he does, from hand

to mouth, nothing is too good for him to eat; and he will eat it. His

drink, too, will need to be carefully provided; there is much drink

in this country 'not good enough' for a Dartie; he will have the best.

Paying for things vicariously, there is no reason why he should stint

himself. To stint yourself is the mark of a fool, not of a Dartie.

The best of everything! No sounder principle on which a man can base

his life, whose father-in-law has a very considerable income, and a

partiality for his grandchildren.

With his not unable eye Dartie had spotted this weakness in James

the very first year after little Publius's arrival (an error); he had

profited by his perspicacity. Four little Darties were now a sort of

perpetual insurance.

The feature of the feast was unquestionably the red mullet. This

delectable fish, brought from a considerable distance in a state of

almost perfect preservation, was first fried, then boned, then served in

ice, with Madeira punch in place of sauce, according to a recipe known

to a few men of the world.

Nothing else calls for remark except the payment of the bill by Dartie.

He had made himself extremely agreeable throughout the meal; his bold,

admiring stare seldom abandoning Irene's face and figure. As he was

obliged to confess to himself, he got no change out of her--she was cool

enough, as cool as her shoulders looked under their veil of creamy lace.

He expected to have caught her out in some little game with Bosinney;

but not a bit of it, she kept up her end remarkably well. As for that

architect chap, he was as glum as a bear with a sore head--Winifred

could barely get a word out of him; he ate nothing, but he certainly

took his liquor, and his face kept getting whiter, and his eyes looked

queer.

It was all very amusing.

For Dartie himself was in capital form, and talked freely, with a

certain poignancy, being no fool. He told two or three stories verging

on the improper, a concession to the company, for his stories were not

used to verging. He proposed Irene's health in a mock speech. Nobody

drank it, and Winifred said: "Don't be such a clown, Monty!"

At her suggestion they went after dinner to the public terrace

overlooking the river.

"I should like to see the common people making love," she said, "it's

such fun!"

There were numbers of them walking in the cool, after the day's heat,

and the air was alive with the sound of voices, coarse and loud, or soft

as though murmuring secrets.

It was not long before Winifred's better sense--she was the only Forsyte

present--secured them an empty bench. They sat down in a row. A heavy

tree spread a thick canopy above their heads, and the haze darkened

slowly over the river.

Dartie sat at the end, next to him Irene, then Bosinney, then Winifred.

There was hardly room for four, and the man of the world could feel

Irene's arm crushed against his own; he knew that she could not withdraw

it without seeming rude, and this amused him; he devised every now and

again a movement that would bring her closer still. He thought: 'That

Buccaneer Johnny shan't have it all to himself! It's a pretty tight fit,

certainly!'

From far down below on the dark river came drifting the tinkle of a

mandoline, and voices singing the old round:

'A boat, a boat, unto the ferry, For we'll go over and be merry; And

laugh, and quaff, and drink brown sherry!'

And suddenly the moon appeared, young and tender, floating up on her

back from behind a tree; and as though she had breathed, the air was

cooler, but down that cooler air came always the warm odour of the

limes.

Over his cigar Dartie peered round at Bosinney, who was sitting with his

arms crossed, staring straight in front of him, and on his face the look

of a man being tortured.

And Dartie shot a glance at the face between, so veiled by the

overhanging shadow that it was but like a darker piece of the darkness

shaped and breathed on; soft, mysterious, enticing.

A hush had fallen on the noisy terrace, as if all the strollers were

thinking secrets too precious to be spoken.

And Dartie thought: 'Women!'

The glow died above the river, the singing ceased; the young moon hid

behind a tree, and all was dark. He pressed himself against Irene.

He was not alarmed at the shuddering that ran through the limbs he

touched, or at the troubled, scornful look of her eyes. He felt her

trying to draw herself away, and smiled.

It must be confessed that the man of the world had drunk quite as much

as was good for him.

With thick lips parted under his well-curled moustaches, and his bold

eyes aslant upon her, he had the malicious look of a satyr.

Along the pathway of sky between the hedges of the tree tops the stars

clustered forth; like mortals beneath, they seemed to shift and swarm

and whisper. Then on the terrace the buzz broke out once more, and

Dartie thought: 'Ah! he's a poor, hungry-looking devil, that Bosinney!'

and again he pressed himself against Irene.

The movement deserved a better success. She rose, and they all followed

her.

The man of the world was more than ever determined to see what she was

made of. Along the terrace he kept close at her elbow. He had within him

much good wine. There was the long drive home, the long drive and

the warm dark and the pleasant closeness of the hansom cab--with its

insulation from the world devised by some great and good man. That

hungry architect chap might drive with his wife--he wished him joy of

her! And, conscious that his voice was not too steady, he was careful

not to speak; but a smile had become fixed on his thick lips.

They strolled along toward the cabs awaiting them at the farther end.

His plan had the merit of all great plans, an almost brutal

simplicity--he would merely keep at her elbow till she got in, and get

in quickly after her.

But when Irene reached the cab she did not get in; she slipped, instead,

to the horse's head. Dartie was not at the moment sufficiently master

of his legs to follow. She stood stroking the horse's nose, and, to his

annoyance, Bosinney was at her side first. She turned and spoke to him

rapidly, in a low voice; the words 'That man' reached Dartie. He stood

stubbornly by the cab step, waiting for her to come back. He knew a

trick worth two of that!

Here, in the lamp-light, his figure (no more than medium height), well

squared in its white evening waistcoat, his light overcoat flung over

his arm, a pink flower in his button-hole, and on his dark face that

look of confident, good-humoured insolence, he was at his best--a

thorough man of the world.

Winifred was already in her cab. Dartie reflected that Bosinney would

have a poorish time in that cab if he didn't look sharp! Suddenly he

received a push which nearly overturned him in the road. Bosinney's

voice hissed in his ear: "I am taking Irene back; do you understand?" He

saw a face white with passion, and eyes that glared at him like a wild

cat's.

"Eh?" he stammered. "What? Not a bit. You take my wife!"

"Get away!" hissed Bosinney--"or I'll throw you into the road!"

Dartie recoiled; he saw as plainly as possible that the fellow meant it.

In the space he made Irene had slipped by, her dress brushed his legs.

Bosinney stepped in after her.

"Go on!" he heard the Buccaneer cry. The cabman flicked his horse. It

sprang forward.

Dartie stood for a moment dumbfounded; then, dashing at the cab where

his wife sat, he scrambled in.

"Drive on!" he shouted to the driver, "and don't you lose sight of that

fellow in front!"

Seated by his wife's side, he burst into imprecations. Calming himself

at last with a supreme effort, he added: "A pretty mess you've made of

it, to let the Buccaneer drive home with her; why on earth couldn't you

keep hold of him? He's mad with love; any fool can see that!"

He drowned Winifred's rejoinder with fresh calls to the Almighty; nor

was it until they reached Barnes that he ceased a Jeremiad, in the

course of which he had abused her, her father, her brother, Irene,

Bosinney, the name of Forsyte, his own children, and cursed the day when

he had ever married.

Winifred, a woman of strong character, let him have his say, at the end

of which he lapsed into sulky silence. His angry eyes never deserted

the back of that cab, which, like a lost chance, haunted the darkness in

front of him.

Fortunately he could not hear Bosinney's passionate pleading--that

pleading which the man of the world's conduct had let loose like a

flood; he could not see Irene shivering, as though some garment had

been torn from her, nor her eyes, black and mournful, like the eyes of a

beaten child. He could not hear Bosinney entreating, entreating, always

entreating; could not hear her sudden, soft weeping, nor see that poor,

hungry-looking devil, awed and trembling, humbly touching her hand.

In Montpellier Square their cabman, following his instructions to the

letter, faithfully drew up behind the cab in front. The Darties saw

Bosinney spring out, and Irene follow, and hasten up the steps with

bent head. She evidently had her key in her hand, for she disappeared

at once. It was impossible to tell whether she had turned to speak to

Bosinney.

The latter came walking past their cab; both husband and wife had an

admirable view of his face in the light of a street lamp. It was working

with violent emotion.

"Good-night, Mr. Bosinney!" called Winifred.

Bosinney started, clawed off his hat, and hurried on. He had obviously

forgotten their existence.

"There!" said Dartie, "did you see the beast's face? What did I say?

Fine games!" He improved the occasion.

There had so clearly been a crisis in the cab that Winifred was unable

to defend her theory.

She said: "I shall say nothing about it. I don't see any use in making a

fuss!"

With that view Dartie at once concurred; looking upon James as a private

preserve, he disapproved of his being disturbed by the troubles of

others.

"Quite right," he said; "let Soames look after himself. He's jolly well

able to!"

Thus speaking, the Darties entered their habitat in Green Street, the

rent of which was paid by James, and sought a well-earned rest. The hour

was midnight, and no Forsytes remained abroad in the streets to spy out

Bosinney's wanderings; to see him return and stand against the rails

of the Square garden, back from the glow of the street lamp; to see him

stand there in the shadow of trees, watching the house where in the dark

was hidden she whom he would have given the world to see for a single

minute--she who was now to him the breath of the lime-trees, the meaning

of the light and the darkness, the very beating of his own heart.

CHAPTER X--DIAGNOSIS OF A FORSYTE

It is in the nature of a Forsyte to be ignorant that he is a Forsyte;

but young Jolyon was well aware of being one. He had not known it till

after the decisive step which had made him an outcast; since then the

knowledge had been with him continually. He felt it throughout his

alliance, throughout all his dealings with his second wife, who was

emphatically not a Forsyte.

He knew that if he had not possessed in great measure the eye for what

he wanted, the tenacity to hold on to it, the sense of the folly of

wasting that for which he had given so big a price--in other words,

the 'sense of property' he could never have retained her (perhaps never

would have desired to retain her) with him through all the financial

troubles, slights, and misconstructions of those fifteen years; never

have induced her to marry him on the death of his first wife; never have

lived it all through, and come up, as it were, thin, but smiling.

He was one of those men who, seated cross-legged like miniature Chinese

idols in the cages of their own hearts, are ever smiling at themselves a

doubting smile. Not that this smile, so intimate and eternal, interfered

with his actions, which, like his chin and his temperament, were quite a

peculiar blend of softness and determination.

He was conscious, too, of being a Forsyte in his work, that painting of

water-colours to which he devoted so much energy, always with an eye

on himself, as though he could not take so unpractical a pursuit quite

seriously, and always with a certain queer uneasiness that he did not

make more money at it.

It was, then, this consciousness of what it meant to be a Forsyte, that

made him receive the following letter from old Jolyon, with a mixture of

sympathy and disgust:

'SHELDRAKE HOUSE,

'BROADSTAIRS,

'July 1. 'MY DEAR JO,'

(The Dad's handwriting had altered very little in the thirty odd years

that he remembered it.)

'We have been here now a fortnight, and have had good weather on the

whole. The air is bracing, but my liver is out of order, and I shall be

glad enough to get back to town. I cannot say much for June, her health

and spirits are very indifferent, and I don't see what is to come of

it. She says nothing, but it is clear that she is harping on this

engagement, which is an engagement and no engagement, and--goodness

knows what. I have grave doubts whether she ought to be allowed

to return to London in the present state of affairs, but she is so

self-willed that she might take it into her head to come up at any

moment. The fact is someone ought to speak to Bosinney and ascertain

what he means. I'm afraid of this myself, for I should certainly rap

him over the knuckles, but I thought that you, knowing him at the Club,

might put in a word, and get to ascertain what the fellow is about. You

will of course in no way commit June. I shall be glad to hear from you

in the course of a few days whether you have succeeded in gaining any

information. The situation is very distressing to me, I worry about it

at night.

With my love to Jolly and Holly.

'I am,

'Your affect. father,

'JOLYON FORSYTE.'

Young Jolyon pondered this letter so long and seriously that his

wife noticed his preoccupation, and asked him what was the matter. He

replied: "Nothing."

It was a fixed principle with him never to allude to June. She

might take alarm, he did not know what she might think; he hastened,

therefore, to banish from his manner all traces of absorption, but in

this he was about as successful as his father would have been, for

he had inherited all old Jolyon's transparency in matters of domestic

finesse; and young Mrs. Jolyon, busying herself over the affairs of

the house, went about with tightened lips, stealing at him unfathomable

looks.

He started for the Club in the afternoon with the letter in his pocket,

and without having made up his mind.

To sound a man as to 'his intentions' was peculiarly unpleasant to him;

nor did his own anomalous position diminish this unpleasantness. It was

so like his family, so like all the people they knew and mixed with, to

enforce what they called their rights over a man, to bring him up to the

mark; so like them to carry their business principles into their private

relations.

And how that phrase in the letter--'You will, of course, in no way

commit June'--gave the whole thing away.

Yet the letter, with the personal grievance, the concern for June, the

'rap over the knuckles,' was all so natural. No wonder his father wanted

to know what Bosinney meant, no wonder he was angry.

It was difficult to refuse! But why give the thing to him to do? That

was surely quite unbecoming; but so long as a Forsyte got what he was

after, he was not too particular about the means, provided appearances

were saved.

How should he set about it, or how refuse? Both seemed impossible. So,

young Jolyon!

He arrived at the Club at three o'clock, and the first person he saw was

Bosinney himself, seated in a corner, staring out of the window.

Young Jolyon sat down not far off, and began nervously to reconsider his

position. He looked covertly at Bosinney sitting there unconscious. He

did not know him very well, and studied him attentively for perhaps the

first time; an unusual looking man, unlike in dress, face, and manner

to most of the other members of the Club--young Jolyon himself, however

different he had become in mood and temper, had always retained the neat

reticence of Forsyte appearance. He alone among Forsytes was ignorant of

Bosinney's nickname. The man was unusual, not eccentric, but unusual;

he looked worn, too, haggard, hollow in the cheeks beneath those broad,

high cheekbones, though without any appearance of ill-health, for he was

strongly built, with curly hair that seemed to show all the vitality of

a fine constitution.

Something in his face and attitude touched young Jolyon. He knew what

suffering was like, and this man looked as if he were suffering.

He got up and touched his arm.

Bosinney started, but exhibited no sign of embarrassment on seeing who

it was.

Young Jolyon sat down.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," he said. "How are you getting on

with my cousin's house?"

"It'll be finished in about a week."

"I congratulate you!"

"Thanks--I don't know that it's much of a subject for congratulation."

"No?" queried young Jolyon; "I should have thought you'd be glad to get

a long job like that off your hands; but I suppose you feel it much as I

do when I part with a picture--a sort of child?"

He looked kindly at Bosinney.

"Yes," said the latter more cordially, "it goes out from you and there's

an end of it. I didn't know you painted."

"Only water-colours; I can't say I believe in my work."

"Don't believe in it? There--how can you do it? Work's no use unless you

believe in it!"

"Good," said young Jolyon; "it's exactly what I've always said.

By-the-bye, have you noticed that whenever one says 'Good,' one always

adds 'it's exactly what I've always said'! But if you ask me how I do

it, I answer, because I'm a Forsyte."

"A Forsyte! I never thought of you as one!"

"A Forsyte," replied young Jolyon, "is not an uncommon animal. There

are hundreds among the members of this Club. Hundreds out there in the

streets; you meet them wherever you go!"

"And how do you tell them, may I ask?" said Bosinney.

"By their sense of property. A Forsyte takes a practical--one might say

a commonsense--view of things, and a practical view of things is based

fundamentally on a sense of property. A Forsyte, you will notice, never

gives himself away."

"Joking?"

Young Jolyon's eye twinkled.

"Not much. As a Forsyte myself, I have no business to talk. But I'm a

kind of thoroughbred mongrel; now, there's no mistaking you: You're

as different from me as I am from my Uncle James, who is the perfect

specimen of a Forsyte. His sense of property is extreme, while you have

practically none. Without me in between, you would seem like a different

species. I'm the missing link. We are, of course, all of us the slaves

of property, and I admit that it's a question of degree, but what I

call a 'Forsyte' is a man who is decidedly more than less a slave of

property. He knows a good thing, he knows a safe thing, and his grip

on property--it doesn't matter whether it be wives, houses, money, or

reputation--is his hall-mark."

"Ah!" murmured Bosinney. "You should patent the word."

"I should like," said young Jolyon, "to lecture on it:

"Properties and quality of a Forsyte: This little animal, disturbed

by the ridicule of his own sort, is unaffected in his motions by the

laughter of strange creatures (you or I). Hereditarily disposed to

myopia, he recognises only the persons of his own species, amongst which

he passes an existence of competitive tranquillity."

"You talk of them," said Bosinney, "as if they were half England."

"They are," repeated young Jolyon, "half England, and the better half,

too, the safe half, the three per cent. half, the half that counts. It's

their wealth and security that makes everything possible; makes your art

possible, makes literature, science, even religion, possible. Without

Forsytes, who believe in none of these things, and habitats but turn

them all to use, where should we be? My dear sir, the Forsytes are the

middlemen, the commercials, the pillars of society, the cornerstones of

convention; everything that is admirable!"

"I don't know whether I catch your drift," said Bosinney, "but I fancy

there are plenty of Forsytes, as you call them, in my profession."

"Certainly," replied young Jolyon. "The great majority of architects,

painters, or writers have no principles, like any other Forsytes. Art,

literature, religion, survive by virtue of the few cranks who really

believe in such things, and the many Forsytes who make a commercial use

of them. At a low estimate, three-fourths of our Royal Academicians

are Forsytes, seven-eighths of our novelists, a large proportion of the

press. Of science I can't speak; they are magnificently represented in

religion; in the House of Commons perhaps more numerous than anywhere;

the aristocracy speaks for itself. But I'm not laughing. It is dangerous

to go against the majority and what a majority!" He fixed his eyes on

Bosinney: "It's dangerous to let anything carry you away--a house, a

picture, a--woman!"

They looked at each other.--And, as though he had done that which no

Forsyte did--given himself away, young Jolyon drew into his shell.

Bosinney broke the silence.

"Why do you take your own people as the type?" said he.

"My people," replied young Jolyon, "are not very extreme, and they

have their own private peculiarities, like every other family, but they

possess in a remarkable degree those two qualities which are the real

tests of a Forsyte--the power of never being able to give yourself up to

anything soul and body, and the 'sense of property'."

Bosinney smiled: "How about the big one, for instance?"

"Do you mean Swithin?" asked young Jolyon. "Ah! in Swithin there's

something primeval still. The town and middle-class life haven't

digested him yet. All the old centuries of farm work and brute

force have settled in him, and there they've stuck, for all he's so

distinguished."

Bosinney seemed to ponder. "Well, you've hit your cousin Soames off to

the life," he said suddenly. "He'll never blow his brains out."

Young Jolyon shot at him a penetrating glance.

"No," he said; "he won't. That's why he's to be reckoned with. Look out

for their grip! It's easy to laugh, but don't mistake me. It doesn't do

to despise a Forsyte; it doesn't do to disregard them!"

"Yet you've done it yourself!"

Young Jolyon acknowledged the hit by losing his smile.

"You forget," he said with a queer pride, "I can hold on, too--I'm

a Forsyte myself. We're all in the path of great forces. The man who

leaves the shelter of the wall--well--you know what I mean. I don't,"

he ended very low, as though uttering a threat, "recommend every man

to-go-my-way. It depends."

The colour rushed into Bosinney's face, but soon receded, leaving it

sallow-brown as before. He gave a short laugh, that left his lips fixed

in a queer, fierce smile; his eyes mocked young Jolyon.

"Thanks," he said. "It's deuced kind of you. But you're not the only

chaps that can hold on." He rose.

Young Jolyon looked after him as he walked away, and, resting his head

on his hand, sighed.

In the drowsy, almost empty room the only sounds were the rustle of

newspapers, the scraping of matches being struck. He stayed a long time

without moving, living over again those days when he, too, had sat long

hours watching the clock, waiting for the minutes to pass--long hours

full of the torments of uncertainty, and of a fierce, sweet aching; and

the slow, delicious agony of that season came back to him with its

old poignancy. The sight of Bosinney, with his haggard face, and his

restless eyes always wandering to the clock, had roused in him a pity,

with which was mingled strange, irresistible envy.

He knew the signs so well. Whither was he going--to what sort of fate?

What kind of woman was it who was drawing him to her by that magnetic

force which no consideration of honour, no principle, no interest could

withstand; from which the only escape was flight.

Flight! But why should Bosinney fly? A man fled when he was in danger

of destroying hearth and home, when there were children, when he felt

himself trampling down ideals, breaking something. But here, so he had

heard, it was all broken to his hand.

He himself had not fled, nor would he fly if it were all to come over

again. Yet he had gone further than Bosinney, had broken up his own

unhappy home, not someone else's: And the old saying came back to him:

'A man's fate lies in his own heart.'

In his own heart! The proof of the pudding was in the eating--Bosinney

had still to eat his pudding.

His thoughts passed to the woman, the woman whom he did not know, but

the outline of whose story he had heard.

An unhappy marriage! No ill-treatment--only that indefinable malaise,

that terrible blight which killed all sweetness under Heaven; and so

from day to day, from night to night, from week to week, from year to

year, till death should end it.

But young Jolyon, the bitterness of whose own feelings time had

assuaged, saw Soames' side of the question too. Whence should a man like

his cousin, saturated with all the prejudices and beliefs of his class,

draw the insight or inspiration necessary to break up this life? It was

a question of imagination, of projecting himself into the future

beyond the unpleasant gossip, sneers, and tattle that followed on such

separations, beyond the passing pangs that the lack of the sight of her

would cause, beyond the grave disapproval of the worthy. But few men,

and especially few men of Soames' class, had imagination enough for

that. A deal of mortals in this world, and not enough imagination to go

round! And sweet Heaven, what a difference between theory and practice;

many a man, perhaps even Soames, held chivalrous views on such matters,

who when the shoe pinched found a distinguishing factor that made of

himself an exception.

Then, too, he distrusted his judgment. He had been through the

experience himself, had tasted too the dregs the bitterness of an

unhappy marriage, and how could he take the wide and dispassionate view

of those who had never been within sound of the battle? His evidence was

too first-hand--like the evidence on military matters of a soldier who

has been through much active service, against that of civilians who have

not suffered the disadvantage of seeing things too close. Most people

would consider such a marriage as that of Soames and Irene quite fairly

successful; he had money, she had beauty; it was a case for compromise.

There was no reason why they should not jog along, even if they hated

each other. It would not matter if they went their own ways a little so

long as the decencies were observed--the sanctity of the marriage tie,

of the common home, respected. Half the marriages of the upper classes

were conducted on these lines: Do not offend the susceptibilities of

Society; do not offend the susceptibilities of the Church. To avoid

offending these is worth the sacrifice of any private feelings. The

advantages of the stable home are visible, tangible, so many pieces of

property; there is no risk in the statu quo. To break up a home is at

the best a dangerous experiment, and selfish into the bargain.

This was the case for the defence, and young Jolyon sighed.

'The core of it all,' he thought, 'is property, but there are many

people who would not like it put that way. To them it is "the sanctity

of the marriage tie"; but the sanctity of the marriage tie is dependent

on the sanctity of the family, and the sanctity of the family is

dependent on the sanctity of property. And yet I imagine all these

people are followers of One who never owned anything. It is curious!

And again young Jolyon sighed.

'Am I going on my way home to ask any poor devils I meet to share my

dinner, which will then be too little for myself, or, at all events,

for my wife, who is necessary to my health and happiness? It may be that

after all Soames does well to exercise his rights and support by his

practice the sacred principle of property which benefits us all, with

the exception of those who suffer by the process.'

And so he left his chair, threaded his way through the maze of seats,

took his hat, and languidly up the hot streets crowded with carriages,

reeking with dusty odours, wended his way home.

Before reaching Wistaria Avenue he removed old Jolyon's letter from his

pocket, and tearing it carefully into tiny pieces, scattered them in the

dust of the road.

He let himself in with his key, and called his wife's name. But she had

gone out, taking Jolly and Holly, and the house was empty; alone in the

garden the dog Balthasar lay in the shade snapping at flies.

Young Jolyon took his seat there, too, under the pear-tree that bore no

fruit.

CHAPTER XI--BOSINNEY ON PAROLE

The day after the evening at Richmond Soames returned from Henley by a

morning train. Not constitutionally interested in amphibious sports, his

visit had been one of business rather than pleasure, a client of some

importance having asked him down.

He went straight to the City, but finding things slack, he left at three

o'clock, glad of this chance to get home quietly. Irene did not expect

him. Not that he had any desire to spy on her actions, but there was no

harm in thus unexpectedly surveying the scene.

After changing to Park clothes he went into the drawing-room. She was

sitting idly in the corner of the sofa, her favourite seat; and there

were circles under her eyes, as though she had not slept.

He asked: "How is it you're in? Are you expecting somebody?"

"Yes that is, not particularly."

"Who?"

"Mr. Bosinney said he might come."

"Bosinney. He ought to be at work."

To this she made no answer.

"Well," said Soames, "I want you to come out to the Stores with me, and

after that we'll go to the Park."

"I don't want to go out; I have a headache."

Soames replied: "If ever I want you to do anything, you've always got a

headache. It'll do you good to come and sit under the trees."

She did not answer.

Soames was silent for some minutes; at last he said: "I don't know what

your idea of a wife's duty is. I never have known!"

He had not expected her to reply, but she did.

"I have tried to do what you want; it's not my fault that I haven't been

able to put my heart into it."

"Whose fault is it, then?" He watched her askance.

"Before we were married you promised to let me go if our marriage was

not a success. Is it a success?"

Soames frowned.

"Success," he stammered--"it would be a success if you behaved yourself

properly!"

"I have tried," said Irene. "Will you let me go?"

Soames turned away. Secretly alarmed, he took refuge in bluster.

"Let you go? You don't know what you're talking about. Let you go? How

can I let you go? We're married, aren't we? Then, what are you talking

about? For God's sake, don't let's have any of this sort of nonsense!

Get your hat on, and come and sit in the Park."

"Then, you won't let me go?"

He felt her eyes resting on him with a strange, touching look.

"Let you go!" he said; "and what on earth would you do with yourself if

I did? You've got no money!"

"I could manage somehow."

He took a swift turn up and down the room; then came and stood before

her.

"Understand," he said, "once and for all, I won't have you say this sort

of thing. Go and get your hat on!"

She did not move.

"I suppose," said Soames, "you don't want to miss Bosinney if he comes!"

Irene got up slowly and left the room. She came down with her hat on.

They went out.

In the Park, the motley hour of mid-afternoon, when foreigners and other

pathetic folk drive, thinking themselves to be in fashion, had passed;

the right, the proper, hour had come, was nearly gone, before Soames and

Irene seated themselves under the Achilles statue.

It was some time since he had enjoyed her company in the Park. That was

one of the past delights of the first two seasons of his married life,

when to feel himself the possessor of this gracious creature before all

London had been his greatest, though secret, pride. How many afternoons

had he not sat beside her, extremely neat, with light grey gloves and

faint, supercilious smile, nodding to acquaintances, and now and again

removing his hat.

His light grey gloves were still on his hands, and on his lips his smile

sardonic, but where the feeling in his heart?

The seats were emptying fast, but still he kept her there, silent and

pale, as though to work out a secret punishment. Once or twice he made

some comment, and she bent her head, or answered "Yes" with a tired

smile.

Along the rails a man was walking so fast that people stared after him

when he passed.

"Look at that ass!" said Soames; "he must be mad to walk like that in

this heat!"

He turned; Irene had made a rapid movement.

"Hallo!" he said: "it's our friend the Buccaneer!"

And he sat still, with his sneering smile, conscious that Irene was

sitting still, and smiling too.

"Will she bow to him?" he thought.

But she made no sign.

Bosinney reached the end of the rails, and came walking back amongst

the chairs, quartering his ground like a pointer. When he saw them he

stopped dead, and raised his hat.

The smile never left Soames' face; he also took off his hat.

Bosinney came up, looking exhausted, like a man after hard physical

exercise; the sweat stood in drops on his brow, and Soames' smile seemed

to say: "You've had a trying time, my friend.... What are \_you\_ doing in

the Park?" he asked. "We thought you despised such frivolity!"

Bosinney did not seem to hear; he made his answer to Irene: "I've been

round to your place; I hoped I should find you in."

Somebody tapped Soames on the back, and spoke to him; and in the

exchange of those platitudes over his shoulder, he missed her answer,

and took a resolution.

"We're just going in," he said to Bosinney; "you'd better come back

to dinner with us." Into that invitation he put a strange bravado, a

stranger pathos: "You, can't deceive me," his look and voice seemed

saying, "but see--I trust you--I'm not afraid of you!"

They started back to Montpellier Square together, Irene between them. In

the crowded streets Soames went on in front. He did not listen to their

conversation; the strange resolution of trustfulness he had taken seemed

to animate even his secret conduct. Like a gambler, he said to himself:

'It's a card I dare not throw away--I must play it for what it's worth.

I have not too many chances.'

He dressed slowly, heard her leave her room and go downstairs, and, for

full five minutes after, dawdled about in his dressing-room. Then

he went down, purposely shutting the door loudly to show that he was

coming. He found them standing by the hearth, perhaps talking, perhaps

not; he could not say.

He played his part out in the farce, the long evening through--his

manner to his guest more friendly than it had ever been before; and when

at last Bosinney went, he said: "You must come again soon; Irene likes

to have you to talk about the house!" Again his voice had the strange

bravado and the stranger pathos; but his hand was cold as ice.

Loyal to his resolution, he turned away from their parting, turned

away from his wife as she stood under the hanging lamp to say

good-night--away from the sight of her golden head shining so under the

light, of her smiling mournful lips; away from the sight of Bosinney's

eyes looking at her, so like a dog's looking at its master.

And he went to bed with the certainty that Bosinney was in love with his

wife.

The summer night was hot, so hot and still that through every opened

window came in but hotter air. For long hours he lay listening to her

breathing.

She could sleep, but he must lie awake. And, lying awake, he hardened

himself to play the part of the serene and trusting husband.

In the small hours he slipped out of bed, and passing into his

dressing-room, leaned by the open window.

He could hardly breathe.

A night four years ago came back to him--the night but one before his

marriage; as hot and stifling as this.

He remembered how he had lain in a long cane chair in the window of his

sitting-room off Victoria Street. Down below in a side street a man had

banged at a door, a woman had cried out; he remembered, as though it

were now, the sound of the scuffle, the slam of the door, the dead

silence that followed. And then the early water-cart, cleansing the

reek of the streets, had approached through the strange-seeming, useless

lamp-light; he seemed to hear again its rumble, nearer and nearer, till

it passed and slowly died away.

He leaned far out of the dressing-room window over the little court

below, and saw the first light spread. The outlines of dark walls and

roofs were blurred for a moment, then came out sharper than before.

He remembered how that other night he had watched the lamps paling all

the length of Victoria Street; how he had hurried on his clothes and

gone down into the street, down past houses and squares, to the street

where she was staying, and there had stood and looked at the front of

the little house, as still and grey as the face of a dead man.

And suddenly it shot through his mind; like a sick man's fancy: What's

he doing?--that fellow who haunts me, who was here this evening, who's

in love with my wife--prowling out there, perhaps, looking for her as I

know he was looking for her this afternoon; watching my house now, for

all I can tell!

He stole across the landing to the front of the house, stealthily drew

aside a blind, and raised a window.

The grey light clung about the trees of the square, as though Night,

like a great downy moth, had brushed them with her wings. The lamps

were still alight, all pale, but not a soul stirred--no living thing in

sight.

Yet suddenly, very faint, far off in the deathly stillness, he heard

a cry writhing, like the voice of some wandering soul barred out of

heaven, and crying for its happiness. There it was again--again! Soames

shut the window, shuddering.

Then he thought: 'Ah! it's only the peacocks, across the water.'

CHAPTER XII--JUNE PAYS SOME CALLS

Jolyon stood in the narrow hall at Broadstairs, inhaling that odour

of oilcloth and herrings which permeates all respectable seaside

lodging-houses. On a chair--a shiny leather chair, displaying its

horsehair through a hole in the top left-hand corner--stood a black

despatch case. This he was filling with papers, with the Times, and a

bottle of Eau-de Cologne. He had meetings that day of the 'Globular Gold

Concessions' and the 'New Colliery Company, Limited,' to which he was

going up, for he never missed a Board; to 'miss a Board' would be one

more piece of evidence that he was growing old, and this his jealous

Forsyte spirit could not bear.

His eyes, as he filled that black despatch case, looked as if at any

moment they might blaze up with anger. So gleams the eye of a schoolboy,

baited by a ring of his companions; but he controls himself, deterred by

the fearful odds against him. And old Jolyon controlled himself,

keeping down, with his masterful restraint now slowly wearing out, the

irritation fostered in him by the conditions of his life.

He had received from his son an unpractical letter, in which by rambling

generalities the boy seemed trying to get out of answering a plain

question. 'I've seen Bosinney,' he said; 'he is not a criminal. The

more I see of people the more I am convinced that they are never good or

bad--merely comic, or pathetic. You probably don't agree with me!'

Old Jolyon did not; he considered it cynical to so express oneself; he

had not yet reached that point of old age when even Forsytes, bereft of

those illusions and principles which they have cherished carefully

for practical purposes but never believed in, bereft of all corporeal

enjoyment, stricken to the very heart by having nothing left to hope

for--break through the barriers of reserve and say things they would

never have believed themselves capable of saying.

Perhaps he did not believe in 'goodness' and 'badness' any more than

his son; but as he would have said: He didn't know--couldn't tell;

there might be something in it; and why, by an unnecessary expression of

disbelief, deprive yourself of possible advantage?

Accustomed to spend his holidays among the mountains, though (like a

true Forsyte) he had never attempted anything too adventurous or too

foolhardy, he had been passionately fond of them. And when the wonderful

view (mentioned in Baedeker--'fatiguing but repaying')--was disclosed to

him after the effort of the climb, he had doubtless felt the existence

of some great, dignified principle crowning the chaotic strivings, the

petty precipices, and ironic little dark chasms of life. This was as

near to religion, perhaps, as his practical spirit had ever gone.

But it was many years since he had been to the mountains. He had taken

June there two seasons running, after his wife died, and had realized

bitterly that his walking days were over.

To that old mountain--given confidence in a supreme order of things he

had long been a stranger.

He knew himself to be old, yet he felt young; and this troubled him. It

troubled and puzzled him, too, to think that he, who had always been

so careful, should be father and grandfather to such as seemed born

to disaster. He had nothing to say against Jo--who could say anything

against the boy, an amiable chap?--but his position was deplorable, and

this business of June's nearly as bad. It seemed like a fatality, and

a fatality was one of those things no man of his character could either

understand or put up with.

In writing to his son he did not really hope that anything would come

of it. Since the ball at Roger's he had seen too clearly how the land

lay--he could put two and two together quicker than most men--and, with

the example of his own son before his eyes, knew better than any Forsyte

of them all that the pale flame singes men's wings whether they will or

no.

In the days before June's engagement, when she and Mrs. Soames were

always together, he had seen enough of Irene to feel the spell she cast

over men. She was not a flirt, not even a coquette--words dear to the

heart of his generation, which loved to define things by a good, broad,

inadequate word--but she was dangerous. He could not say why. Tell him

of a quality innate in some women--a seductive power beyond their own

control! He would but answer: 'Humbug!' She was dangerous, and there was

an end of it. He wanted to close his eyes to that affair. If it was, it

was; he did not want to hear any more about it--he only wanted to save

June's position and her peace of mind. He still hoped she might once

more become a comfort to himself.

And so he had written. He got little enough out of the answer. As to

what young Jolyon had made of the interview, there was practically only

the queer sentence: 'I gather that he's in the stream.' The stream! What

stream? What was this new-fangled way of talking?

He sighed, and folded the last of the papers under the flap of the bag;

he knew well enough what was meant.

June came out of the dining-room, and helped him on with his summer

coat. From her costume, and the expression of her little resolute face,

he saw at once what was coming.

"I'm going with you," she said.

"Nonsense, my dear; I go straight into the City. I can't have you

racketting about!"

"I must see old Mrs. Smeech."

"Oh, your precious 'lame ducks!" grumbled out old Jolyon. He did not

believe her excuse, but ceased his opposition. There was no doing

anything with that pertinacity of hers.

At Victoria he put her into the carriage which had been ordered for

himself--a characteristic action, for he had no petty selfishnesses.

"Now, don't you go tiring yourself, my darling," he said, and took a cab

on into the city.

June went first to a back-street in Paddington, where Mrs. Smeech,

her 'lame duck,' lived--an aged person, connected with the charring

interest; but after half an hour spent in hearing her habitually

lamentable recital, and dragooning her into temporary comfort, she went

on to Stanhope Gate. The great house was closed and dark.

She had decided to learn something at all costs. It was better to face

the worst, and have it over. And this was her plan: To go first to

Phil's aunt, Mrs. Baynes, and, failing information there, to Irene

herself. She had no clear notion of what she would gain by these visits.

At three o'clock she was in Lowndes Square. With a woman's instinct when

trouble is to be faced, she had put on her best frock, and went to the

battle with a glance as courageous as old Jolyon's itself. Her tremors

had passed into eagerness.

Mrs. Baynes, Bosinney's aunt (Louisa was her name), was in her kitchen

when June was announced, organizing the cook, for she was an excellent

housewife, and, as Baynes always said, there was 'a lot in a good

dinner.' He did his best work after dinner. It was Baynes who built that

remarkably fine row of tall crimson houses in Kensington which compete

with so many others for the title of 'the ugliest in London.'

On hearing June's name, she went hurriedly to her bedroom, and, taking

two large bracelets from a red morocco case in a locked drawer, put

them on her white wrists--for she possessed in a remarkable degree that

'sense of property,' which, as we know, is the touchstone of Forsyteism,

and the foundation of good morality.

Her figure, of medium height and broad build, with a tendency to

embonpoint, was reflected by the mirror of her whitewood wardrobe, in

a gown made under her own organization, of one of those half-tints,

reminiscent of the distempered walls of corridors in large hotels. She

raised her hands to her hair, which she wore a la Princesse de Galles,

and touched it here and there, settling it more firmly on her head, and

her eyes were full of an unconscious realism, as though she were looking

in the face one of life's sordid facts, and making the best of it. In

youth her cheeks had been of cream and roses, but they were mottled now

by middle-age, and again that hard, ugly directness came into her eyes

as she dabbed a powder-puff across her forehead. Putting the puff down,

she stood quite still before the glass, arranging a smile over her high,

important nose, her chin, (never large, and now growing smaller

with the increase of her neck), her thin-lipped, down-drooping mouth.

Quickly, not to lose the effect, she grasped her skirts strongly in both

hands, and went downstairs.

She had been hoping for this visit for some time past. Whispers had

reached her that things were not all right between her nephew and his

fiancee. Neither of them had been near her for weeks. She had asked Phil

to dinner many times; his invariable answer had been 'Too busy.'

Her instinct was alarmed, and the instinct in such matters of this

excellent woman was keen. She ought to have been a Forsyte; in young

Jolyon's sense of the word, she certainly had that privilege, and merits

description as such.

She had married off her three daughters in a way that people said was

beyond their deserts, for they had the professional plainness only to be

found, as a rule, among the female kind of the more legal callings. Her

name was upon the committees of numberless charities connected with

the Church-dances, theatricals, or bazaars--and she never lent her name

unless sure beforehand that everything had been thoroughly organized.

She believed, as she often said, in putting things on a commercial

basis; the proper function of the Church, of charity, indeed, of

everything, was to strengthen the fabric of 'Society.' Individual

action, therefore, she considered immoral. Organization was the only

thing, for by organization alone could you feel sure that you were

getting a return for your money. Organization--and again, organization!

And there is no doubt that she was what old Jolyon called her--"a 'dab'

at that"--he went further, he called her "a humbug."

The enterprises to which she lent her name were organized so admirably

that by the time the takings were handed over, they were indeed skim

milk divested of all cream of human kindness. But as she often justly

remarked, sentiment was to be deprecated. She was, in fact, a little

academic.

This great and good woman, so highly thought of in ecclesiastical

circles, was one of the principal priestesses in the temple of

Forsyteism, keeping alive day and night a sacred flame to the God of

Property, whose altar is inscribed with those inspiring words: 'Nothing

for nothing, and really remarkably little for sixpence.'

When she entered a room it was felt that something substantial had come

in, which was probably the reason of her popularity as a patroness.

People liked something substantial when they had paid money for it; and

they would look at her--surrounded by her staff in charity ballrooms,

with her high nose and her broad, square figure, attired in an uniform

covered with sequins--as though she were a general.

The only thing against her was that she had not a double name. She was a

power in upper middle-class society, with its hundred sets and circles,

all intersecting on the common battlefield of charity functions, and

on that battlefield brushing skirts so pleasantly with the skirts

of Society with the capital 'S.' She was a power in society with the

smaller 's,' that larger, more significant, and more powerful body,

where the commercially Christian institutions, maxims, and 'principle,'

which Mrs. Baynes embodied, were real life-blood, circulating freely,

real business currency, not merely the sterilized imitation that flowed

in the veins of smaller Society with the larger 'S.' People who knew her

felt her to be sound--a sound woman, who never gave herself away, nor

anything else, if she could possibly help it.

She had been on the worst sort of terms with Bosinney's father, who had

not infrequently made her the object of an unpardonable ridicule. She

alluded to him now that he was gone as her 'poor, dear, irreverend

brother.'

She greeted June with the careful effusion of which she was a mistress,

a little afraid of her as far as a woman of her eminence in the

commercial and Christian world could be afraid--for so slight a girl

June had a great dignity, the fearlessness of her eyes gave her that.

And Mrs. Baynes, too, shrewdly recognized that behind the uncompromising

frankness of June's manner there was much of the Forsyte. If the girl

had been merely frank and courageous, Mrs. Baynes would have thought

her 'cranky,' and despised her; if she had been merely a Forsyte, like

Francie--let us say--she would have patronized her from sheer weight of

metal; but June, small though she was--Mrs. Baynes habitually admired

quantity--gave her an uneasy feeling; and she placed her in a chair

opposite the light.

There was another reason for her respect which Mrs. Baynes, too good a

churchwoman to be worldly, would have been the last to admit--she often

heard her husband describe old Jolyon as extremely well off, and was

biassed towards his granddaughter for the soundest of all reasons.

To-day she felt the emotion with which we read a novel describing a hero

and an inheritance, nervously anxious lest, by some frightful lapse of

the novelist, the young man should be left without it at the end.

Her manner was warm; she had never seen so clearly before how

distinguished and desirable a girl this was. She asked after old

Jolyon's health. A wonderful man for his age; so upright, and young

looking, and how old was he? Eighty-one! She would never have thought

it! They were at the sea! Very nice for them; she supposed June heard

from Phil every day? Her light grey eyes became more prominent as she

asked this question; but the girl met the glance without flinching.

"No," she said, "he never writes!"

Mrs. Baynes's eyes dropped; they had no intention of doing so, but they

did. They recovered immediately.

"Of course not. That's Phil all over--he was always like that!"

"Was he?" said June.

The brevity of the answer caused Mrs. Baynes's bright smile a moment's

hesitation; she disguised it by a quick movement, and spreading her

skirts afresh, said: "Why, my dear--he's quite the most harum-scarum

person; one never pays the slightest attention to what he does!"

The conviction came suddenly to June that she was wasting her time; even

were she to put a question point-blank, she would never get anything out

of this woman.

'Do you see him?' she asked, her face crimsoning.

The perspiration broke out on Mrs. Baynes' forehead beneath the powder.

"Oh, yes! I don't remember when he was here last--indeed, we haven't

seen much of him lately. He's so busy with your cousin's house; I'm

told it'll be finished directly. We must organize a little dinner to

celebrate the event; do come and stay the night with us!"

"Thank you," said June. Again she thought: 'I'm only wasting my time.

This woman will tell me nothing.'

She got up to go. A change came over Mrs. Baynes. She rose too; her lips

twitched, she fidgeted her hands. Something was evidently very wrong,

and she did not dare to ask this girl, who stood there, a slim, straight

little figure, with her decided face, her set jaw, and resentful

eyes. She was not accustomed to be afraid of asking questions--all

organization was based on the asking of questions!

But the issue was so grave that her nerve, normally strong, was fairly

shaken; only that morning her husband had said: "Old Mr. Forsyte must be

worth well over a hundred thousand pounds!"

And this girl stood there, holding out her hand--holding out her hand!

The chance might be slipping away--she couldn't tell--the chance of

keeping her in the family, and yet she dared not speak.

Her eyes followed June to the door.

It closed.

Then with an exclamation Mrs. Baynes ran forward, wobbling her bulky

frame from side to side, and opened it again.

Too late! She heard the front door click, and stood still, an expression

of real anger and mortification on her face.

June went along the Square with her bird-like quickness. She detested

that woman now whom in happier days she had been accustomed to think

so kind. Was she always to be put off thus, and forced to undergo this

torturing suspense?

She would go to Phil himself, and ask him what he meant. She had the

right to know. She hurried on down Sloane Street till she came to

Bosinney's number. Passing the swing-door at the bottom, she ran up the

stairs, her heart thumping painfully.

At the top of the third flight she paused for breath, and holding on to

the bannisters, stood listening. No sound came from above.

With a very white face she mounted the last flight. She saw the door,

with his name on the plate. And the resolution that had brought her so

far evaporated.

The full meaning of her conduct came to her. She felt hot all over;

the palms of her hands were moist beneath the thin silk covering of her

gloves.

She drew back to the stairs, but did not descend. Leaning against the

rail she tried to get rid of a feeling of being choked; and she gazed

at the door with a sort of dreadful courage. No! she refused to go down.

Did it matter what people thought of her? They would never know! No one

would help her if she did not help herself! She would go through with

it.

Forcing herself, therefore, to leave the support of the wall, she rang

the bell. The door did not open, and all her shame and fear suddenly

abandoned her; she rang again and again, as though in spite of its

emptiness she could drag some response out of that closed room, some

recompense for the shame and fear that visit had cost her. It did not

open; she left off ringing, and, sitting down at the top of the stairs,

buried her face in her hands.

Presently she stole down, out into the air. She felt as though she had

passed through a bad illness, and had no desire now but to get home as

quickly as she could. The people she met seemed to know where she had

been, what she had been doing; and suddenly--over on the opposite side,

going towards his rooms from the direction of Montpellier Square--she

saw Bosinney himself.

She made a movement to cross into the traffic. Their eyes met, and he

raised his hat. An omnibus passed, obscuring her view; then, from the

edge of the pavement, through a gap in the traffic, she saw him walking

on.

And June stood motionless, looking after him.

CHAPTER XIII--PERFECTION OF THE HOUSE

'One mockturtle, clear; one oxtail; two glasses of port.'

In the upper room at French's, where a Forsyte could still get heavy

English food, James and his son were sitting down to lunch.

Of all eating-places James liked best to come here; there was something

unpretentious, well-flavoured, and filling about it, and though he

had been to a certain extent corrupted by the necessity for being

fashionable, and the trend of habits keeping pace with an income that

would increase, he still hankered in quiet City moments after the tasty

fleshpots of his earlier days. Here you were served by hairy English

waiters in aprons; there was sawdust on the floor, and three round

gilt looking-glasses hung just above the line of sight. They had only

recently done away with the cubicles, too, in which you could have your

chop, prime chump, with a floury-potato, without seeing your neighbours,

like a gentleman.

He tucked the top corner of his napkin behind the third button of his

waistcoat, a practice he had been obliged to abandon years ago in the

West End. He felt that he should relish his soup--the entire morning had

been given to winding up the estate of an old friend.

After filling his mouth with household bread, stale, he at once began:

"How are you going down to Robin Hill? You going to take Irene? You'd

better take her. I should think there'll be a lot that'll want seeing

to."

Without looking up, Soames answered: "She won't go."

"Won't go? What's the meaning of that? She's going to live in the house,

isn't she?"

Soames made no reply.

"I don't know what's coming to women nowadays," mumbled James; "I never

used to have any trouble with them. She's had too much liberty. She's

spoiled...."

Soames lifted his eyes: "I won't have anything said against her," he

said unexpectedly.

The silence was only broken now by the supping of James's soup.

The waiter brought the two glasses of port, but Soames stopped him.

"That's not the way to serve port," he said; "take them away, and bring

the bottle."

Rousing himself from his reverie over the soup, James took one of his

rapid shifting surveys of surrounding facts.

"Your mother's in bed," he said; "you can have the carriage to take you

down. I should think Irene'd like the drive. This young Bosinney'll be

there, I suppose, to show you over."

Soames nodded.

"I should like to go and see for myself what sort of a job he's made

finishing off," pursued James. "I'll just drive round and pick you both

up."

"I am going down by train," replied Soames. "If you like to drive round

and see, Irene might go with you, I can't tell."

He signed to the waiter to bring the bill, which James paid.

They parted at St. Paul's, Soames branching off to the station, James

taking his omnibus westwards.

He had secured the corner seat next the conductor, where his long legs

made it difficult for anyone to get in, and at all who passed him he

looked resentfully, as if they had no business to be using up his air.

He intended to take an opportunity this afternoon of speaking to Irene.

A word in time saved nine; and now that she was going to live in the

country there was a chance for her to turn over a new leaf! He could see

that Soames wouldn't stand very much more of her goings on!

It did not occur to him to define what he meant by her 'goings on'; the

expression was wide, vague, and suited to a Forsyte. And James had more

than his common share of courage after lunch.

On reaching home, he ordered out the barouche, with special instructions

that the groom was to go too. He wished to be kind to her, and to give

her every chance.

When the door of No.62 was opened he could distinctly hear her singing,

and said so at once, to prevent any chance of being denied entrance.

Yes, Mrs. Soames was in, but the maid did not know if she was seeing

people.

James, moving with the rapidity that ever astonished the observers

of his long figure and absorbed expression, went forthwith into the

drawing-room without permitting this to be ascertained. He found Irene

seated at the piano with her hands arrested on the keys, evidently

listening to the voices in the hall. She greeted him without smiling.

"Your mother-in-law's in bed," he began, hoping at once to enlist her

sympathy. "I've got the carriage here. Now, be a good girl, and put on

your hat and come with me for a drive. It'll do you good!"

Irene looked at him as though about to refuse, but, seeming to change

her mind, went upstairs, and came down again with her hat on.

"Where are you going to take me?" she asked.

"We'll just go down to Robin Hill," said James, spluttering out his

words very quick; "the horses want exercise, and I should like to see

what they've been doing down there."

Irene hung back, but again changed her mind, and went out to the

carriage, James brooding over her closely, to make quite sure.

It was not before he had got her more than half way that he began:

"Soames is very fond of you--he won't have anything said against you;

why don't you show him more affection?"

Irene flushed, and said in a low voice: "I can't show what I haven't

got."

James looked at her sharply; he felt that now he had her in his own

carriage, with his own horses and servants, he was really in command of

the situation. She could not put him off; nor would she make a scene in

public.

"I can't think what you're about," he said. "He's a very good husband!"

Irene's answer was so low as to be almost inaudible among the sounds of

traffic. He caught the words: "You are not married to him!"

"What's that got to do with it? He's given you everything you want. He's

always ready to take you anywhere, and now he's built you this house in

the country. It's not as if you had anything of your own."

"No."

Again James looked at her; he could not make out the expression on her

face. She looked almost as if she were going to cry, and yet....

"I'm sure," he muttered hastily, "we've all tried to be kind to you."

Irene's lips quivered; to his dismay James saw a tear steal down her

cheek. He felt a choke rise in his own throat.

"We're all fond of you," he said, "if you'd only"--he was going to say,

"behave yourself," but changed it to--"if you'd only be more of a wife

to him."

Irene did not answer, and James, too, ceased speaking. There was

something in her silence which disconcerted him; it was not the silence

of obstinacy, rather that of acquiescence in all that he could find to

say. And yet he felt as if he had not had the last word. He could not

understand this.

He was unable, however, to long keep silence.

"I suppose that young Bosinney," he said, "will be getting married to

June now?"

Irene's face changed. "I don't know," she said; "you should ask her."

"Does she write to you?"

"No."

"How's that?" said James. "I thought you and she were such great

friends."

Irene turned on him. "Again," she said, "you should ask her!"

"Well," flustered James, frightened by her look, "it's very odd that I

can't get a plain answer to a plain question, but there it is."

He sat ruminating over his rebuff, and burst out at last:

"Well, I've warned you. You won't look ahead. Soames he doesn't say

much, but I can see he won't stand a great deal more of this sort of

thing. You'll have nobody but yourself to blame, and, what's more,

you'll get no sympathy from anybody."

Irene bent her head with a little smiling bow. "I am very much obliged

to you."

James did not know what on earth to answer.

The bright hot morning had changed slowly to a grey, oppressive

afternoon; a heavy bank of clouds, with the yellow tinge of coming

thunder, had risen in the south, and was creeping up.

The branches of the trees dropped motionless across the road without the

smallest stir of foliage. A faint odour of glue from the heated horses

clung in the thick air; the coachman and groom, rigid and unbending,

exchanged stealthy murmurs on the box, without ever turning their heads.

To James' great relief they reached the house at last; the silence and

impenetrability of this woman by his side, whom he had always thought so

soft and mild, alarmed him.

The carriage put them down at the door, and they entered.

The hall was cool, and so still that it was like passing into a tomb;

a shudder ran down James's spine. He quickly lifted the heavy leather

curtains between the columns into the inner court.

He could not restrain an exclamation of approval.

The decoration was really in excellent taste. The dull ruby tiles that

extended from the foot of the walls to the verge of a circular clump

of tall iris plants, surrounding in turn a sunken basin of white marble

filled with water, were obviously of the best quality. He admired

extremely the purple leather curtains drawn along one entire side,

framing a huge white-tiled stove. The central partitions of the skylight

had been slid back, and the warm air from outside penetrated into the

very heart of the house.

He stood, his hands behind him, his head bent back on his high, narrow

shoulders, spying the tracery on the columns and the pattern of the

frieze which ran round the ivory-coloured walls under the gallery.

Evidently, no pains had been spared. It was quite the house of a

gentleman. He went up to the curtains, and, having discovered how they

were worked, drew them asunder and disclosed the picture-gallery, ending

in a great window taking up the whole end of the room. It had a black

oak floor, and its walls, again, were of ivory white. He went on

throwing open doors, and peeping in. Everything was in apple-pie order,

ready for immediate occupation.

He turned round at last to speak to Irene, and saw her standing over in

the garden entrance, with her husband and Bosinney.

Though not remarkable for sensibility, James felt at once that something

was wrong. He went up to them, and, vaguely alarmed, ignorant of the

nature of the trouble, made an attempt to smooth things over.

"How are you, Mr. Bosinney?" he said, holding out his hand. "You've been

spending money pretty freely down here, I should say!"

Soames turned his back, and walked away.

James looked from Bosinney's frowning face to Irene, and, in his

agitation, spoke his thoughts aloud: "Well, I can't tell what's the

matter. Nobody tells me anything!" And, making off after his son, he

heard Bosinney's short laugh, and his "Well, thank God! You look so...."

Most unfortunately he lost the rest.

What had happened? He glanced back. Irene was very close to the

architect, and her face not like the face he knew of her. He hastened up

to his son.

Soames was pacing the picture-gallery.

"What's the matter?" said James. "What's all this?"

Soames looked at him with his supercilious calm unbroken, but James knew

well enough that he was violently angry.

"Our friend," he said, "has exceeded his instructions again, that's all.

So much the worse for him this time."

He turned round and walked back towards the door. James followed

hurriedly, edging himself in front. He saw Irene take her finger from

before her lips, heard her say something in her ordinary voice, and

began to speak before he reached them.

"There's a storm coming on. We'd better get home. We can't take you, I

suppose, Mr. Bosinney? No, I suppose not. Then, good-bye!" He held out

his hand. Bosinney did not take it, but, turning with a laugh, said:

"Good-bye, Mr. Forsyte. Don't get caught in the storm!" and walked away.

"Well," began James, "I don't know...."

But the sight of Irene's face stopped him. Taking hold of his

daughter-in-law by the elbow, he escorted her towards the carriage. He

felt certain, quite certain, they had been making some appointment or

other....

Nothing in this world is more sure to upset a Forsyte than the discovery

that something on which he has stipulated to spend a certain sum

has cost more. And this is reasonable, for upon the accuracy of his

estimates the whole policy of his life is ordered. If he cannot rely

on definite values of property, his compass is amiss; he is adrift upon

bitter waters without a helm.

After writing to Bosinney in the terms that have already been

chronicled, Soames had dismissed the cost of the house from his mind.

He believed that he had made the matter of the final cost so very

plain that the possibility of its being again exceeded had really never

entered his head. On hearing from Bosinney that his limit of twelve

thousand pounds would be exceeded by something like four hundred, he had

grown white with anger. His original estimate of the cost of the house

completed had been ten thousand pounds, and he had often blamed himself

severely for allowing himself to be led into repeated excesses. Over

this last expenditure, however, Bosinney had put himself completely

in the wrong. How on earth a fellow could make such an ass of himself

Soames could not conceive; but he had done so, and all the rancour and

hidden jealousy that had been burning against him for so long was now

focussed in rage at this crowning piece of extravagance. The attitude of

the confident and friendly husband was gone. To preserve property--his

wife--he had assumed it, to preserve property of another kind he lost it

now.

"Ah!" he had said to Bosinney when he could speak, "and I suppose you're

perfectly contented with yourself. But I may as well tell you that

you've altogether mistaken your man!"

What he meant by those words he did not quite know at the time, but

after dinner he looked up the correspondence between himself and

Bosinney to make quite sure. There could be no two opinions about

it--the fellow had made himself liable for that extra four hundred, or,

at all events, for three hundred and fifty of it, and he would have to

make it good.

He was looking at his wife's face when he came to this conclusion.

Seated in her usual seat on the sofa, she was altering the lace on a

collar. She had not once spoken to him all the evening.

He went up to the mantelpiece, and contemplating his face in the mirror

said: "Your friend the Buccaneer has made a fool of himself; he will

have to pay for it!"

She looked at him scornfully, and answered: "I don't know what you are

talking about!"

"You soon will. A mere trifle, quite beneath your contempt--four hundred

pounds."

"Do you mean that you are going to make him pay that towards this

hateful, house?"

"I do."

"And you know he's got nothing?"

"Yes."

"Then you are meaner than I thought you."

Soames turned from the mirror, and unconsciously taking a china cup from

the mantelpiece, clasped his hands around it as though praying. He saw

her bosom rise and fall, her eyes darkening with anger, and taking no

notice of the taunt, he asked quietly:

"Are you carrying on a flirtation with Bosinney?"

"No, I am not!"

Her eyes met his, and he looked away. He neither believed nor

disbelieved her, but he knew that he had made a mistake in asking; he

never had known, never would know, what she was thinking. The sight of

her inscrutable face, the thought of all the hundreds of evenings he

had seen her sitting there like that soft and passive, but unreadable,

unknown, enraged him beyond measure.

"I believe you are made of stone," he said, clenching his fingers so

hard that he broke the fragile cup. The pieces fell into the grate. And

Irene smiled.

"You seem to forget," she said, "that cup is not!"

Soames gripped her arm. "A good beating," he said, "is the only thing

that would bring you to your senses," but turning on his heel, he left

the room.

CHAPTER XIV--SOAMES SITS ON THE STAIRS

Soames went up-stairs that night with the feeling that he had gone too

far. He was prepared to offer excuses for his words.

He turned out the gas still burning in the passage outside their room.

Pausing, with his hand on the knob of the door, he tried to shape his

apology, for he had no intention of letting her see that he was nervous.

But the door did not open, nor when he pulled it and turned the handle

firmly. She must have locked it for some reason, and forgotten.

Entering his dressing-room, where the gas was also lighted and burning

low, he went quickly to the other door. That too was locked. Then he

noticed that the camp bed which he occasionally used was prepared, and

his sleeping-suit laid out upon it. He put his hand up to his forehead,

and brought it away wet. It dawned on him that he was barred out.

He went back to the door, and rattling the handle stealthily, called:

"Unlock the door, do you hear? Unlock the door!"

There was a faint rustling, but no answer.

"Do you hear? Let me in at once--I insist on being let in!"

He could catch the sound of her breathing close to the door, like the

breathing of a creature threatened by danger.

There was something terrifying in this inexorable silence, in the

impossibility of getting at her. He went back to the other door, and

putting his whole weight against it, tried to burst it open. The door

was a new one--he had had them renewed himself, in readiness for their

coming in after the honeymoon. In a rage he lifted his foot to kick

in the panel; the thought of the servants restrained him, and he felt

suddenly that he was beaten.

Flinging himself down in the dressing-room, he took up a book.

But instead of the print he seemed to see his wife--with her yellow hair

flowing over her bare shoulders, and her great dark eyes--standing like

an animal at bay. And the whole meaning of her act of revolt came to

him. She meant it to be for good.

He could not sit still, and went to the door again. He could still hear

her, and he called: "Irene! Irene!"

He did not mean to make his voice pathetic.

In ominous answer, the faint sounds ceased. He stood with clenched

hands, thinking.

Presently he stole round on tiptoe, and running suddenly at the other

door, made a supreme effort to break it open. It creaked, but did not

yield. He sat down on the stairs and buried his face in his hands.

For a long time he sat there in the dark, the moon through the skylight

above laying a pale smear which lengthened slowly towards him down the

stairway. He tried to be philosophical.

Since she had locked her doors she had no further claim as a wife, and

he would console himself with other women.

It was but a spectral journey he made among such delights--he had no

appetite for these exploits. He had never had much, and he had lost the

habit. He felt that he could never recover it. His hunger could only

be appeased by his wife, inexorable and frightened, behind these shut

doors. No other woman could help him.

This conviction came to him with terrible force out there in the dark.

His philosophy left him; and surly anger took its place. Her conduct

was immoral, inexcusable, worthy of any punishment within his power. He

desired no one but her, and she refused him!

She must really hate him, then! He had never believed it yet. He did not

believe it now. It seemed to him incredible. He felt as though he had

lost for ever his power of judgment. If she, so soft and yielding as

he had always judged her, could take this decided step--what could not

happen?

Then he asked himself again if she were carrying on an intrigue with

Bosinney. He did not believe that she was; he could not afford to

believe such a reason for her conduct--the thought was not to be faced.

It would be unbearable to contemplate the necessity of making his

marital relations public property. Short of the most convincing proofs

he must still refuse to believe, for he did not wish to punish himself.

And all the time at heart--he did believe.

The moonlight cast a greyish tinge over his figure, hunched against the

staircase wall.

Bosinney was in love with her! He hated the fellow, and would not spare

him now. He could and would refuse to pay a penny piece over

twelve thousand and fifty pounds--the extreme limit fixed in the

correspondence; or rather he would pay, he would pay and sue him for

damages. He would go to Jobling and Boulter and put the matter in their

hands. He would ruin the impecunious beggar! And suddenly--though what

connection between the thoughts?--he reflected that Irene had no money

either. They were both beggars. This gave him a strange satisfaction.

The silence was broken by a faint creaking through the wall. She was

going to bed at last. Ah! Joy and pleasant dreams! If she threw the door

open wide he would not go in now!

But his lips, that were twisted in a bitter smile, twitched; he covered

his eyes with his hands....

It was late the following afternoon when Soames stood in the dining-room

window gazing gloomily into the Square.

The sunlight still showered on the plane-trees, and in the breeze their

gay broad leaves shone and swung in rhyme to a barrel organ at the

corner. It was playing a waltz, an old waltz that was out of fashion,

with a fateful rhythm in the notes; and it went on and on, though

nothing indeed but leaves danced to the tune.

The woman did not look too gay, for she was tired; and from the tall

houses no one threw her down coppers. She moved the organ on, and three

doors off began again.

It was the waltz they had played at Roger's when Irene had danced with

Bosinney; and the perfume of the gardenias she had worn came back to

Soames, drifted by the malicious music, as it had been drifted to him

then, when she passed, her hair glistening, her eyes so soft, drawing

Bosinney on and on down an endless ballroom.

The organ woman plied her handle slowly; she had been grinding her tune

all day-grinding it in Sloane Street hard by, grinding it perhaps to

Bosinney himself.

Soames turned, took a cigarette from the carven box, and walked back to

the window. The tune had mesmerized him, and there came into his view

Irene, her sunshade furled, hastening homewards down the Square, in a

soft, rose-coloured blouse with drooping sleeves, that he did not know.

She stopped before the organ, took out her purse, and gave the woman

money.

Soames shrank back and stood where he could see into the hall.

She came in with her latch-key, put down her sunshade, and stood looking

at herself in the glass. Her cheeks were flushed as if the sun had

burned them; her lips were parted in a smile. She stretched her arms out

as though to embrace herself, with a laugh that for all the world was

like a sob.

Soames stepped forward.

"Very-pretty!" he said.

But as though shot she spun round, and would have passed him up the

stairs. He barred the way.

"Why such a hurry?" he said, and his eyes fastened on a curl of hair

fallen loose across her ear....

He hardly recognised her. She seemed on fire, so deep and rich the

colour of her cheeks, her eyes, her lips, and of the unusual blouse she

wore.

She put up her hand and smoothed back the curl. She was breathing fast

and deep, as though she had been running, and with every breath perfume

seemed to come from her hair, and from her body, like perfume from an

opening flower.

"I don't like that blouse," he said slowly, "it's a soft, shapeless

thing!"

He lifted his finger towards her breast, but she dashed his hand aside.

"Don't touch me!" she cried.

He caught her wrist; she wrenched it away.

"And where may you have been?" he asked.

"In heaven--out of this house!" With those words she fled upstairs.

Outside--in thanksgiving--at the very door, the organ-grinder was

playing the waltz.

And Soames stood motionless. What prevented him from following her?

Was it that, with the eyes of faith, he saw Bosinney looking down from

that high window in Sloane Street, straining his eyes for yet another

glimpse of Irene's vanished figure, cooling his flushed face, dreaming

of the moment when she flung herself on his breast--the scent of her

still in the air around, and the sound of her laugh that was like a sob?

PART III

CHAPTER I--MRS. MACANDER'S EVIDENCE

Many people, no doubt, including the editor of the 'Ultra

Vivisectionist,' then in the bloom of its first youth, would say that

Soames was less than a man not to have removed the locks from his wife's

doors, and, after beating her soundly, resumed wedded happiness.

Brutality is not so deplorably diluted by humaneness as it used to be,

yet a sentimental segment of the population may still be relieved to

learn that he did none of these things. For active brutality is not

popular with Forsytes; they are too circumspect, and, on the whole, too

softhearted. And in Soames there was some common pride, not sufficient

to make him do a really generous action, but enough to prevent his

indulging in an extremely mean one, except, perhaps, in very hot blood.

Above all this a true Forsyte refused to feel himself ridiculous.

Short of actually beating his wife, he perceived nothing to be done; he

therefore accepted the situation without another word.

Throughout the summer and autumn he continued to go to the office, to

sort his pictures, and ask his friends to dinner.

He did not leave town; Irene refused to go away. The house at Robin

Hill, finished though it was, remained empty and ownerless. Soames had

brought a suit against the Buccaneer, in which he claimed from him the

sum of three hundred and fifty pounds.

A firm of solicitors, Messrs. Freak and Able, had put in a defence

on Bosinney's behalf. Admitting the facts, they raised a point on the

correspondence which, divested of legal phraseology, amounted to this:

To speak of 'a free hand in the terms of this correspondence' is an

Irish bull.

By a chance, fortuitous but not improbable in the close borough of legal

circles, a good deal of information came to Soames' ear anent this line

of policy, the working partner in his firm, Bustard, happening to sit

next at dinner at Walmisley's, the Taxing Master, to young Chankery, of

the Common Law Bar.

The necessity for talking what is known as 'shop,' which comes on all

lawyers with the removal of the ladies, caused Chankery, a young

and promising advocate, to propound an impersonal conundrum to his

neighbour, whose name he did not know, for, seated as he permanently was

in the background, Bustard had practically no name.

He had, said Chankery, a case coming on with a 'very nice point.' He

then explained, preserving every professional discretion, the riddle

in Soames' case. Everyone, he said, to whom he had spoken, thought it

a nice point. The issue was small unfortunately, 'though d----d

serious for his client he believed'--Walmisley's champagne was bad

but plentiful. A Judge would make short work of it, he was afraid. He

intended to make a big effort--the point was a nice one. What did his

neighbour say?

Bustard, a model of secrecy, said nothing. He related the incident to

Soames however with some malice, for this quiet man was capable of human

feeling, ending with his own opinion that the point was 'a very nice

one.'

In accordance with his resolve, our Forsyte had put his interests

into the hands of Jobling and Boulter. From the moment of doing so he

regretted that he had not acted for himself. On receiving a copy of

Bosinney's defence he went over to their offices.

Boulter, who had the matter in hand, Jobling having died some years

before, told him that in his opinion it was rather a nice point; he

would like counsel's opinion on it.

Soames told him to go to a good man, and they went to Waterbuck, Q.C.,

marking him ten and one, who kept the papers six weeks and then wrote as

follows:

'In my opinion the true interpretation of this correspondence depends

very much on the intention of the parties, and will turn upon the

evidence given at the trial. I am of opinion that an attempt should be

made to secure from the architect an admission that he understood he was

not to spend at the outside more than twelve thousand and fifty pounds.

With regard to the expression, "a free hand in the terms of this

correspondence," to which my attention is directed, the point is a nice

one; but I am of opinion that upon the whole the ruling in "Boileau v.

The Blasted Cement Co., Ltd.," will apply.'

Upon this opinion they acted, administering interrogatories, but to

their annoyance Messrs. Freak and Able answered these in so masterly a

fashion that nothing whatever was admitted and that without prejudice.

It was on October 1 that Soames read Waterbuck's opinion, in the

dining-room before dinner.

It made him nervous; not so much because of the case of 'Boileau v. The

Blasted Cement Co., Ltd.,' as that the point had lately begun to seem to

him, too, a nice one; there was about it just that pleasant flavour

of subtlety so attractive to the best legal appetites. To have his own

impression confirmed by Waterbuck, Q.C., would have disturbed any man.

He sat thinking it over, and staring at the empty grate, for though

autumn had come, the weather kept as gloriously fine that jubilee year

as if it were still high August. It was not pleasant to be disturbed; he

desired too passionately to set his foot on Bosinney's neck.

Though he had not seen the architect since the last afternoon at Robin

Hill, he was never free from the sense of his presence--never free from

the memory of his worn face with its high cheek bones and enthusiastic

eyes. It would not be too much to say that he had never got rid of

the feeling of that night when he heard the peacock's cry at dawn--the

feeling that Bosinney haunted the house. And every man's shape that he

saw in the dark evenings walking past, seemed that of him whom George

had so appropriately named the Buccaneer.

Irene still met him, he was certain; where, or how, he neither knew, nor

asked; deterred by a vague and secret dread of too much knowledge. It

all seemed subterranean nowadays.

Sometimes when he questioned his wife as to where she had been, which

he still made a point of doing, as every Forsyte should, she looked very

strange. Her self-possession was wonderful, but there were moments when,

behind the mask of her face, inscrutable as it had always been to him,

lurked an expression he had never been used to see there.

She had taken to lunching out too; when he asked Bilson if her mistress

had been in to lunch, as often as not she would answer: "No, sir."

He strongly disapproved of her gadding about by herself, and told her

so. But she took no notice. There was something that angered, amazed,

yet almost amused him about the calm way in which she disregarded his

wishes. It was really as if she were hugging to herself the thought of a

triumph over him.

He rose from the perusal of Waterbuck, Q.C.'s opinion, and, going

upstairs, entered her room, for she did not lock her doors till

bed-time--she had the decency, he found, to save the feelings of the

servants. She was brushing her hair, and turned to him with strange

fierceness.

"What do you want?" she said. "Please leave my room!"

He answered: "I want to know how long this state of things between us is

to last? I have put up with it long enough."

"Will you please leave my room?"

"Will you treat me as your husband?"

"No."

"Then, I shall take steps to make you."

"Do!"

He stared, amazed at the calmness of her answer. Her lips were

compressed in a thin line; her hair lay in fluffy masses on her bare

shoulders, in all its strange golden contrast to her dark eyes--those

eyes alive with the emotions of fear, hate, contempt, and odd, haunting

triumph.

"Now, please, will you leave my room?" He turned round, and went sulkily

out.

He knew very well that he had no intention of taking steps, and he saw

that she knew too--knew that he was afraid to.

It was a habit with him to tell her the doings of his day: how such and

such clients had called; how he had arranged a mortgage for Parkes;

how that long-standing suit of Fryer v. Forsyte was getting on, which,

arising in the preternaturally careful disposition of his property by

his great uncle Nicholas, who had tied it up so that no one could get

at it at all, seemed likely to remain a source of income for several

solicitors till the Day of Judgment.

And how he had called in at Jobson's, and seen a Boucher sold, which he

had just missed buying of Talleyrand and Sons in Pall Mall.

He had an admiration for Boucher, Watteau, and all that school. It was a

habit with him to tell her all these matters, and he continued to do it

even now, talking for long spells at dinner, as though by the volubility

of words he could conceal from himself the ache in his heart.

Often, if they were alone, he made an attempt to kiss her when she said

good-night. He may have had some vague notion that some night she would

let him; or perhaps only the feeling that a husband ought to kiss his

wife. Even if she hated him, he at all events ought not to put himself

in the wrong by neglecting this ancient rite.

And why did she hate him? Even now he could not altogether believe it.

It was strange to be hated!--the emotion was too extreme; yet he hated

Bosinney, that Buccaneer, that prowling vagabond, that night-wanderer.

For in his thoughts Soames always saw him lying in wait--wandering. Ah,

but he must be in very low water! Young Burkitt, the architect, had seen

him coming out of a third-rate restaurant, looking terribly down in the

mouth!

During all the hours he lay awake, thinking over the situation,

which seemed to have no end--unless she should suddenly come to her

senses--never once did the thought of separating from his wife seriously

enter his head....

And the Forsytes! What part did they play in this stage of Soames'

subterranean tragedy?

Truth to say, little or none, for they were at the sea.

From hotels, hydropathics, or lodging-houses, they were bathing daily;

laying in a stock of ozone to last them through the winter.

Each section, in the vineyard of its own choosing, grew and culled and

pressed and bottled the grapes of a pet sea-air.

The end of September began to witness their several returns.

In rude health and small omnibuses, with considerable colour in their

cheeks, they arrived daily from the various termini. The following

morning saw them back at their vocations.

On the next Sunday Timothy's was thronged from lunch till dinner.

Amongst other gossip, too numerous and interesting to relate, Mrs.

Septimus Small mentioned that Soames and Irene had not been away.

It remained for a comparative outsider to supply the next evidence of

interest.

It chanced that one afternoon late in September, Mrs. MacAnder, Winifred

Dartie's greatest friend, taking a constitutional, with young Augustus

Flippard, on her bicycle in Richmond Park, passed Irene and Bosinney

walking from the bracken towards the Sheen Gate.

Perhaps the poor little woman was thirsty, for she had ridden long on a

hard, dry road, and, as all London knows, to ride a bicycle and talk to

young Flippard will try the toughest constitution; or perhaps the sight

of the cool bracken grove, whence 'those two' were coming down, excited

her envy. The cool bracken grove on the top of the hill, with the oak

boughs for roof, where the pigeons were raising an endless wedding hymn,

and the autumn, humming, whispered to the ears of lovers in the fern,

while the deer stole by. The bracken grove of irretrievable delights,

of golden minutes in the long marriage of heaven and earth! The bracken

grove, sacred to stags, to strange tree-stump fauns leaping around the

silver whiteness of a birch-tree nymph at summer dusk.

This lady knew all the Forsytes, and having been at June's 'at home,'

was not at a loss to see with whom she had to deal. Her own marriage,

poor thing, had not been successful, but having had the good sense and

ability to force her husband into pronounced error, she herself had

passed through the necessary divorce proceedings without incurring

censure.

She was therefore a judge of all that sort of thing, and lived in one of

those large buildings, where in small sets of apartments, are gathered

incredible quantities of Forsytes, whose chief recreation out of

business hours is the discussion of each other's affairs.

Poor little woman, perhaps she was thirsty, certainly she was bored, for

Flippard was a wit. To see 'those two' in so unlikely a spot was quite a

merciful 'pick-me-up.'

At the MacAnder, like all London, Time pauses.

This small but remarkable woman merits attention; her all-seeing eye

and shrewd tongue were inscrutably the means of furthering the ends of

Providence.

With an air of being in at the death, she had an almost distressing

power of taking care of herself. She had done more, perhaps, in her way

than any woman about town to destroy the sense of chivalry which

still clogs the wheel of civilization. So smart she was, and spoken of

endearingly as 'the little MacAnder!'

Dressing tightly and well, she belonged to a Woman's Club, but was by no

means the neurotic and dismal type of member who was always thinking of

her rights. She took her rights unconsciously, they came natural to

her, and she knew exactly how to make the most of them without exciting

anything but admiration amongst that great class to whom she was

affiliated, not precisely perhaps by manner, but by birth, breeding, and

the true, the secret gauge, a sense of property.

The daughter of a Bedfordshire solicitor, by the daughter of a

clergyman, she had never, through all the painful experience of being

married to a very mild painter with a cranky love of Nature, who had

deserted her for an actress, lost touch with the requirements, beliefs,

and inner feeling of Society; and, on attaining her liberty, she placed

herself without effort in the very van of Forsyteism.

Always in good spirits, and 'full of information,' she was universally

welcomed. She excited neither surprise nor disapprobation when

encountered on the Rhine or at Zermatt, either alone, or travelling with

a lady and two gentlemen; it was felt that she was perfectly capable of

taking care of herself; and the hearts of all Forsytes warmed to that

wonderful instinct, which enabled her to enjoy everything without giving

anything away. It was generally felt that to such women as Mrs. MacAnder

should we look for the perpetuation and increase of our best type of

woman. She had never had any children.

If there was one thing more than another that she could not stand it was

one of those soft women with what men called 'charm' about them, and for

Mrs. Soames she always had an especial dislike.

Obscurely, no doubt, she felt that if charm were once admitted as

the criterion, smartness and capability must go to the wall; and she

hated--with a hatred the deeper that at times this so-called charm

seemed to disturb all calculations--the subtle seductiveness which she

could not altogether overlook in Irene.

She said, however, that she could see nothing in the woman--there was no

'go' about her--she would never be able to stand up for herself--anyone

could take advantage of her, that was plain--she could not see in fact

what men found to admire!

She was not really ill-natured, but, in maintaining her position after

the trying circumstances of her married life, she had found it so

necessary to be 'full of information,' that the idea of holding her

tongue about 'those two' in the Park never occurred to her.

And it so happened that she was dining that very evening at Timothy's,

where she went sometimes to 'cheer the old things up,' as she was wont

to put it. The same people were always asked to meet her: Winifred

Dartie and her husband; Francie, because she belonged to the artistic

circles, for Mrs. MacAnder was known to contribute articles on dress

to 'The Ladies Kingdom Come'; and for her to flirt with, provided they

could be obtained, two of the Hayman boys, who, though they never said

anything, were believed to be fast and thoroughly intimate with all that

was latest in smart Society.

At twenty-five minutes past seven she turned out the electric light

in her little hall, and wrapped in her opera cloak with the chinchilla

collar, came out into the corridor, pausing a moment to make sure she

had her latch-key. These little self-contained flats were convenient; to

be sure, she had no light and no air, but she could shut it up whenever

she liked and go away. There was no bother with servants, and she never

felt tied as she used to when poor, dear Fred was always about, in his

mooney way. She retained no rancour against poor, dear Fred, he was

such a fool; but the thought of that actress drew from her, even now, a

little, bitter, derisive smile.

Firmly snapping the door to, she crossed the corridor, with its gloomy,

yellow-ochre walls, and its infinite vista of brown, numbered doors.

The lift was going down; and wrapped to the ears in the high cloak, with

every one of her auburn hairs in its place, she waited motionless for

it to stop at her floor. The iron gates clanked open; she entered. There

were already three occupants, a man in a great white waistcoat, with

a large, smooth face like a baby's, and two old ladies in black, with

mittened hands.

Mrs. MacAnder smiled at them; she knew everybody; and all these three,

who had been admirably silent before, began to talk at once. This was

Mrs. MacAnder's successful secret. She provoked conversation.

Throughout a descent of five stories the conversation continued, the

lift boy standing with his back turned, his cynical face protruding

through the bars.

At the bottom they separated, the man in the white waistcoat

sentimentally to the billiard room, the old ladies to dine and say to

each other: "A dear little woman!" "Such a rattle!" and Mrs. MacAnder to

her cab.

When Mrs. MacAnder dined at Timothy's, the conversation (although

Timothy himself could never be induced to be present) took that wider,

man-of-the-world tone current among Forsytes at large, and this, no

doubt, was what put her at a premium there.

Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester found it an exhilarating change. "If only,"

they said, "Timothy would meet her!" It was felt that she would do him

good. She could tell you, for instance, the latest story of Sir Charles

Fiste's son at Monte Carlo; who was the real heroine of Tynemouth Eddy's

fashionable novel that everyone was holding up their hands over,

and what they were doing in Paris about wearing bloomers. She was so

sensible, too, knowing all about that vexed question, whether to send

young Nicholas' eldest into the navy as his mother wished, or make

him an accountant as his father thought would be safer. She strongly

deprecated the navy. If you were not exceptionally brilliant or

exceptionally well connected, they passed you over so disgracefully,

and what was it after all to look forward to, even if you became an

admiral--a pittance! An accountant had many more chances, but let him be

put with a good firm, where there was no risk at starting!

Sometimes she would give them a tip on the Stock Exchange; not that Mrs.

Small or Aunt Hester ever took it. They had indeed no money to invest;

but it seemed to bring them into such exciting touch with the realities

of life. It was an event. They would ask Timothy, they said. But they

never did, knowing in advance that it would upset him. Surreptitiously,

however, for weeks after they would look in that paper, which they took

with respect on account of its really fashionable proclivities, to see

whether 'Bright's Rubies' or 'The Woollen Mackintosh Company' were up or

down. Sometimes they could not find the name of the company at all; and

they would wait until James or Roger or even Swithin came in, and ask

them in voices trembling with curiosity how that 'Bolivia Lime and

Speltrate' was doing--they could not find it in the paper.

And Roger would answer: "What do you want to know for? Some trash!

You'll go burning your fingers--investing your money in lime, and things

you know nothing about! Who told you?" and ascertaining what they had

been told, he would go away, and, making inquiries in the City, would

perhaps invest some of his own money in the concern.

It was about the middle of dinner, just in fact as the saddle of mutton

had been brought in by Smither, that Mrs. MacAnder, looking airily

round, said: "Oh! and whom do you think I passed to-day in Richmond

Park? You'll never guess--Mrs. Soames and--Mr. Bosinney. They must have

been down to look at the house!"

Winifred Dartie coughed, and no one said a word. It was the piece of

evidence they had all unconsciously been waiting for.

To do Mrs. MacAnder justice, she had been to Switzerland and the Italian

lakes with a party of three, and had not heard of Soames' rupture with

his architect. She could not tell, therefore, the profound impression

her words would make.

Upright and a little flushed, she moved her small, shrewd eyes from face

to face, trying to gauge the effect of her words. On either side of her

a Hayman boy, his lean, taciturn, hungry face turned towards his plate,

ate his mutton steadily.

These two, Giles and Jesse, were so alike and so inseparable that

they were known as the Dromios. They never talked, and seemed always

completely occupied in doing nothing. It was popularly supposed that

they were cramming for an important examination. They walked without

hats for long hours in the Gardens attached to their house, books in

their hands, a fox-terrier at their heels, never saying a word, and

smoking all the time. Every morning, about fifty yards apart, they

trotted down Campden Hill on two lean hacks, with legs as long as their

own, and every morning about an hour later, still fifty yards apart,

they cantered up again. Every evening, wherever they had dined, they

might be observed about half-past ten, leaning over the balustrade of

the Alhambra promenade.

They were never seen otherwise than together; in this way passing their

lives, apparently perfectly content.

Inspired by some dumb stirring within them of the feelings of gentlemen,

they turned at this painful moment to Mrs. MacAnder, and said in

precisely the same voice: "Have you seen the...?"

Such was her surprise at being thus addressed that she put down her

fork; and Smither, who was passing, promptly removed her plate. Mrs.

MacAnder, however, with presence of mind, said instantly: "I must have a

little more of that nice mutton."

But afterwards in the drawing--room she sat down by Mrs. Small,

determined to get to the bottom of the matter. And she began:

"What a charming woman, Mrs. Soames; such a sympathetic temperament!

Soames is a really lucky man!"

Her anxiety for information had not made sufficient allowance for that

inner Forsyte skin which refuses to share its troubles with outsiders.

Mrs. Septimus Small, drawing herself up with a creak and rustle of her

whole person, said, shivering in her dignity:

"My dear, it is a subject we do not talk about!"

CHAPTER II--NIGHT IN THE PARK

Although with her infallible instinct Mrs. Small had said the very thing

to make her guest 'more intriguee than ever,' it is difficult to see how

else she could truthfully have spoken.

It was not a subject which the Forsytes could talk about even among

themselves--to use the word Soames had invented to characterize to

himself the situation, it was 'subterranean.'

Yet, within a week of Mrs. MacAnder's encounter in Richmond Park, to all

of them--save Timothy, from whom it was carefully kept--to James on his

domestic beat from the Poultry to Park Lane, to George the wild one,

on his daily adventure from the bow window at the Haversnake to the

billiard room at the 'Red Pottle,' was it known that 'those two' had

gone to extremes.

George (it was he who invented many of those striking expressions still

current in fashionable circles) voiced the sentiment more accurately

than any one when he said to his brother Eustace that 'the Buccaneer'

was 'going it'; he expected Soames was about 'fed up.'

It was felt that he must be, and yet, what could be done? He ought

perhaps to take steps; but to take steps would be deplorable.

Without an open scandal which they could not see their way to

recommending, it was difficult to see what steps could be taken. In this

impasse, the only thing was to say nothing to Soames, and nothing to

each other; in fact, to pass it over.

By displaying towards Irene a dignified coldness, some impression might

be made upon her; but she was seldom now to be seen, and there seemed

a slight difficulty in seeking her out on purpose to show her coldness.

Sometimes in the privacy of his bedroom James would reveal to Emily the

real suffering that his son's misfortune caused him.

"I can't tell," he would say; "it worries me out of my life. There'll

be a scandal, and that'll do him no good. I shan't say anything to him.

There might be nothing in it. What do you think? She's very artistic,

they tell me. What? Oh, you're a 'regular Juley! Well, I don't know; I

expect the worst. This is what comes of having no children. I knew how

it would be from the first. They never told me they didn't mean to have

any children--nobody tells me anything!"

On his knees by the side of the bed, his eyes open and fixed with worry,

he would breathe into the counterpane. Clad in his nightshirt, his neck

poked forward, his back rounded, he resembled some long white bird.

"Our Father-," he repeated, turning over and over again the thought of

this possible scandal.

Like old Jolyon, he, too, at the bottom of his heart set the blame of

the tragedy down to family interference. What business had that lot--he

began to think of the Stanhope Gate branch, including young Jolyon and

his daughter, as 'that lot'--to introduce a person like this Bosinney

into the family? (He had heard George's soubriquet, 'The Buccaneer,' but

he could make nothing of that--the young man was an architect.)

He began to feel that his brother Jolyon, to whom he had always looked

up and on whose opinion he had relied, was not quite what he had

expected.

Not having his eldest brother's force of character, he was more sad than

angry. His great comfort was to go to Winifred's, and take the little

Darties in his carriage over to Kensington Gardens, and there, by the

Round Pond, he could often be seen walking with his eyes fixed anxiously

on little Publius Dartie's sailing-boat, which he had himself freighted

with a penny, as though convinced that it would never again come to

shore; while little Publius--who, James delighted to say, was not a bit

like his father skipping along under his lee, would try to get him to

bet another that it never would, having found that it always did. And

James would make the bet; he always paid--sometimes as many as three

or four pennies in the afternoon, for the game seemed never to pall

on little Publius--and always in paying he said: "Now, that's for your

money-box. Why, you're getting quite a rich man!" The thought of his

little grandson's growing wealth was a real pleasure to him. But little

Publius knew a sweet-shop, and a trick worth two of that.

And they would walk home across the Park, James' figure, with high

shoulders and absorbed and worried face, exercising its tall, lean

protectorship, pathetically unregarded, over the robust child-figures of

Imogen and little Publius.

But those Gardens and that Park were not sacred to James. Forsytes and

tramps, children and lovers, rested and wandered day after day, night

after night, seeking one and all some freedom from labour, from the reek

and turmoil of the streets.

The leaves browned slowly, lingering with the sun and summer-like warmth

of the nights.

On Saturday, October 5, the sky that had been blue all day deepened

after sunset to the bloom of purple grapes. There was no moon, and a

clear dark, like some velvety garment, was wrapped around the trees,

whose thinned branches, resembling plumes, stirred not in the still,

warm air. All London had poured into the Park, draining the cup of

summer to its dregs.

Couple after couple, from every gate, they streamed along the paths and

over the burnt grass, and one after another, silently out of the lighted

spaces, stole into the shelter of the feathery trees, where, blotted

against some trunk, or under the shadow of shrubs, they were lost to all

but themselves in the heart of the soft darkness.

To fresh-comers along the paths, these forerunners formed but part of

that passionate dusk, whence only a strange murmur, like the confused

beating of hearts, came forth. But when that murmur reached each couple

in the lamp-light their voices wavered, and ceased; their arms enlaced,

their eyes began seeking, searching, probing the blackness. Suddenly,

as though drawn by invisible hands, they, too, stepped over the railing,

and, silent as shadows, were gone from the light.

The stillness, enclosed in the far, inexorable roar of the town, was

alive with the myriad passions, hopes, and loves of multitudes of

struggling human atoms; for in spite of the disapproval of that great

body of Forsytes, the Municipal Council--to whom Love had long been

considered, next to the Sewage Question, the gravest danger to the

community--a process was going on that night in the Park, and in a

hundred other parks, without which the thousand factories, churches,

shops, taxes, and drains, of which they were custodians, were as

arteries without blood, a man without a heart.

The instincts of self-forgetfulness, of passion, and of love, hiding

under the trees, away from the trustees of their remorseless enemy,

the 'sense of property,' were holding a stealthy revel, and Soames,

returning from Bayswater--for he had been alone to dine at

Timothy's--walking home along the water, with his mind upon that coming

lawsuit, had the blood driven from his heart by a low laugh and the

sound of kisses. He thought of writing to the Times the next morning, to

draw the attention of the Editor to the condition of our parks. He did

not, however, for he had a horror of seeing his name in print.

But starved as he was, the whispered sounds in the stillness, the

half-seen forms in the dark, acted on him like some morbid stimulant. He

left the path along the water and stole under the trees, along the deep

shadow of little plantations, where the boughs of chestnut trees hung

their great leaves low, and there was blacker refuge, shaping his course

in circles which had for their object a stealthy inspection of chairs

side by side, against tree-trunks, of enlaced lovers, who stirred at his

approach.

Now he stood still on the rise overlooking the Serpentine, where, in

full lamp-light, black against the silver water, sat a couple who never

moved, the woman's face buried on the man's neck--a single form, like a

carved emblem of passion, silent and unashamed.

And, stung by the sight, Soames hurried on deeper into the shadow of the

trees.

In this search, who knows what he thought and what he sought? Bread

for hunger--light in darkness? Who knows what he expected to

find--impersonal knowledge of the human heart--the end of his private

subterranean tragedy--for, again, who knew, but that each dark couple,

unnamed, unnameable, might not be he and she?

But it could not be such knowledge as this that he was seeking--the wife

of Soames Forsyte sitting in the Park like a common wench! Such thoughts

were inconceivable; and from tree to tree, with his noiseless step, he

passed.

Once he was sworn at; once the whisper, "If only it could always be like

this!" sent the blood flying again from his heart, and he waited there,

patient and dogged, for the two to move. But it was only a poor thin

slip of a shop-girl in her draggled blouse who passed him, clinging to

her lover's arm.

A hundred other lovers too whispered that hope in the stillness of the

trees, a hundred other lovers clung to each other.

But shaking himself with sudden disgust, Soames returned to the path,

and left that seeking for he knew not what.

CHAPTER III--MEETING AT THE BOTANICAL

Young Jolyon, whose circumstances were not those of a Forsyte, found at

times a difficulty in sparing the money needful for those country

jaunts and researches into Nature, without having prosecuted which no

watercolour artist ever puts brush to paper.

He was frequently, in fact, obliged to take his colour-box into

the Botanical Gardens, and there, on his stool, in the shade of a

monkey-puzzler or in the lee of some India-rubber plant, he would spend

long hours sketching.

An Art critic who had recently been looking at his work had delivered

himself as follows:

"In a way your drawings are very good; tone and colour, in some of

them certainly quite a feeling for Nature. But, you see, they're so

scattered; you'll never get the public to look at them. Now, if you'd

taken a definite subject, such as 'London by Night,' or 'The Crystal

Palace in the Spring,' and made a regular series, the public would have

known at once what they were looking at. I can't lay too much stress

upon that. All the men who are making great names in Art, like Crum

Stone or Bleeder, are making them by avoiding the unexpected; by

specializing and putting their works all in the same pigeon-hole, so

that the public know at once where to go. And this stands to reason,

for if a man's a collector he doesn't want people to smell at the canvas

to find out whom his pictures are by; he wants them to be able to say

at once, 'A capital Forsyte!' It is all the more important for you to be

careful to choose a subject that they can lay hold of on the spot, since

there's no very marked originality in your style."

Young Jolyon, standing by the little piano, where a bowl of dried rose

leaves, the only produce of the garden, was deposited on a bit of faded

damask, listened with his dim smile.

Turning to his wife, who was looking at the speaker with an angry

expression on her thin face, he said:

"You see, dear?"

"I do not," she answered in her staccato voice, that still had a little

foreign accent; "your style has originality."

The critic looked at her, smiled' deferentially, and said no more. Like

everyone else, he knew their history.

The words bore good fruit with young Jolyon; they were contrary to all

that he believed in, to all that he theoretically held good in his Art,

but some strange, deep instinct moved him against his will to turn them

to profit.

He discovered therefore one morning that an idea had come to him for

making a series of watercolour drawings of London. How the idea had

arisen he could not tell; and it was not till the following year, when

he had completed and sold them at a very fair price, that in one of his

impersonal moods, he found himself able to recollect the Art critic, and

to discover in his own achievement another proof that he was a Forsyte.

He decided to commence with the Botanical Gardens, where he had already

made so many studies, and chose the little artificial pond, sprinkled

now with an autumn shower of red and yellow leaves, for though the

gardeners longed to sweep them off, they could not reach them with their

brooms. The rest of the gardens they swept bare enough, removing every

morning Nature's rain of leaves; piling them in heaps, whence from

slow fires rose the sweet, acrid smoke that, like the cuckoo's note for

spring, the scent of lime trees for the summer, is the true emblem of

the fall. The gardeners' tidy souls could not abide the gold and green

and russet pattern on the grass. The gravel paths must lie unstained,

ordered, methodical, without knowledge of the realities of life, nor of

that slow and beautiful decay which flings crowns underfoot to star the

earth with fallen glories, whence, as the cycle rolls, will leap again

wild spring.

Thus each leaf that fell was marked from the moment when it fluttered a

good-bye and dropped, slow turning, from its twig.

But on that little pond the leaves floated in peace, and praised Heaven

with their hues, the sunlight haunting over them.

And so young Jolyon found them.

Coming there one morning in the middle of October, he was disconcerted

to find a bench about twenty paces from his stand occupied, for he had a

proper horror of anyone seeing him at work.

A lady in a velvet jacket was sitting there, with her eyes fixed on the

ground. A flowering laurel, however, stood between, and, taking shelter

behind this, young Jolyon prepared his easel.

His preparations were leisurely; he caught, as every true artist should,

at anything that might delay for a moment the effort of his work, and he

found himself looking furtively at this unknown dame.

Like his father before him, he had an eye for a face. This face was

charming!

He saw a rounded chin nestling in a cream ruffle, a delicate face with

large dark eyes and soft lips. A black 'picture' hat concealed the hair;

her figure was lightly poised against the back of the bench, her knees

were crossed; the tip of a patent-leather shoe emerged beneath her

skirt. There was something, indeed, inexpressibly dainty about the

person of this lady, but young Jolyon's attention was chiefly riveted by

the look on her face, which reminded him of his wife. It was as though

its owner had come into contact with forces too strong for her. It

troubled him, arousing vague feelings of attraction and chivalry. Who

was she? And what doing there, alone?

Two young gentlemen of that peculiar breed, at once forward and shy,

found in the Regent's Park, came by on their way to lawn tennis, and he

noted with disapproval their furtive stares of admiration. A loitering

gardener halted to do something unnecessary to a clump of pampas grass;

he, too, wanted an excuse for peeping. A gentleman, old, and, by his

hat, a professor of horticulture, passed three times to scrutinize her

long and stealthily, a queer expression about his lips.

With all these men young Jolyon felt the same vague irritation. She

looked at none of them, yet was he certain that every man who passed

would look at her like that.

Her face was not the face of a sorceress, who in every look holds out to

men the offer of pleasure; it had none of the 'devil's beauty' so highly

prized among the first Forsytes of the land; neither was it of that

type, no less adorable, associated with the box of chocolate; it was not

of the spiritually passionate, or passionately spiritual order, peculiar

to house-decoration and modern poetry; nor did it seem to promise to

the playwright material for the production of the interesting and

neurasthenic figure, who commits suicide in the last act.

In shape and colouring, in its soft persuasive passivity, its sensuous

purity, this woman's face reminded him of Titian's 'Heavenly Love,' a

reproduction of which hung over the sideboard in his dining-room. And

her attraction seemed to be in this soft passivity, in the feeling she

gave that to pressure she must yield.

For what or whom was she waiting, in the silence, with the trees

dropping here and there a leaf, and the thrushes strutting close on

grass, touched with the sparkle of the autumn rime? Then her charming

face grew eager, and, glancing round, with almost a lover's jealousy,

young Jolyon saw Bosinney striding across the grass.

Curiously he watched the meeting, the look in their eyes, the long

clasp of their hands. They sat down close together, linked for all their

outward discretion. He heard the rapid murmur of their talk; but what

they said he could not catch.

He had rowed in the galley himself! He knew the long hours of waiting

and the lean minutes of a half-public meeting; the tortures of suspense

that haunt the unhallowed lover.

It required, however, but a glance at their two faces to see that this

was none of those affairs of a season that distract men and women about

town; none of those sudden appetites that wake up ravening, and are

surfeited and asleep again in six weeks. This was the real thing! This

was what had happened to himself! Out of this anything might come!

Bosinney was pleading, and she so quiet, so soft, yet immovable in her

passivity, sat looking over the grass.

Was he the man to carry her off, that tender, passive being, who would

never stir a step for herself? Who had given him all herself, and would

die for him, but perhaps would never run away with him!

It seemed to young Jolyon that he could hear her saying: "But, darling,

it would ruin you!" For he himself had experienced to the full the

gnawing fear at the bottom of each woman's heart that she is a drag on

the man she loves.

And he peeped at them no more; but their soft, rapid talk came to

his ears, with the stuttering song of some bird who seemed trying to

remember the notes of spring: Joy--tragedy? Which--which?

And gradually their talk ceased; long silence followed.

'And where does Soames come in?' young Jolyon thought. 'People think she

is concerned about the sin of deceiving her husband! Little they know

of women! She's eating, after starvation--taking her revenge! And Heaven

help her--for he'll take his.'

He heard the swish of silk, and, spying round the laurel, saw them

walking away, their hands stealthily joined....

At the end of July old Jolyon had taken his grand-daughter to the

mountains; and on that visit (the last they ever paid) June recovered

to a great extent her health and spirits. In the hotels, filled with

British Forsytes--for old Jolyon could not bear a 'set of Germans,' as

he called all foreigners--she was looked upon with respect--the only

grand-daughter of that fine-looking, and evidently wealthy, old Mr.

Forsyte. She did not mix freely with people--to mix freely with people

was not June's habit--but she formed some friendships, and notably one

in the Rhone Valley, with a French girl who was dying of consumption.

Determining at once that her friend should not die, she forgot, in the

institution of a campaign against Death, much of her own trouble.

Old Jolyon watched the new intimacy with relief and disapproval; for

this additional proof that her life was to be passed amongst 'lame

ducks' worried him. Would she never make a friendship or take an

interest in something that would be of real benefit to her?

'Taking up with a parcel of foreigners,' he called it. He often,

however, brought home grapes or roses, and presented them to 'Mam'zelle'

with an ingratiating twinkle.

Towards the end of September, in spite of June's disapproval,

Mademoiselle Vigor breathed her last in the little hotel at St. Luc, to

which they had moved her; and June took her defeat so deeply to heart

that old Jolyon carried her away to Paris. Here, in contemplation of the

'Venus de Milo' and the 'Madeleine,' she shook off her depression,

and when, towards the middle of October, they returned to town, her

grandfather believed that he had effected a cure.

No sooner, however, had they established themselves in Stanhope Gate

than he perceived to his dismay a return of her old absorbed and

brooding manner. She would sit, staring in front of her, her chin on her

hand, like a little Norse spirit, grim and intent, while all around in

the electric light, then just installed, shone the great, drawing-room

brocaded up to the frieze, full of furniture from Baple and Pullbred's.

And in the huge gilt mirror were reflected those Dresden china groups

of young men in tight knee breeches, at the feet of full-bosomed ladies

nursing on their laps pet lambs, which old Jolyon had bought when he was

a bachelor and thought so highly of in these days of degenerate taste.

He was a man of most open mind, who, more than any Forsyte of them all,

had moved with the times, but he could never forget that he had bought

these groups at Jobson's, and given a lot of money for them. He often

said to June, with a sort of disillusioned contempt:

"You don't care about them! They're not the gimcrack things you and your

friends like, but they cost me seventy pounds!" He was not a man who

allowed his taste to be warped when he knew for solid reasons that it

was sound.

One of the first things that June did on getting home was to go round to

Timothy's. She persuaded herself that it was her duty to call there, and

cheer him with an account of all her travels; but in reality she went

because she knew of no other place where, by some random speech, or

roundabout question, she could glean news of Bosinney.

They received her most cordially: And how was her dear grandfather? He

had not been to see them since May. Her Uncle Timothy was very poorly,

he had had a lot of trouble with the chimney-sweep in his bedroom; the

stupid man had let the soot down the chimney! It had quite upset her

uncle.

June sat there a long time, dreading, yet passionately hoping, that they

would speak of Bosinney.

But paralyzed by unaccountable discretion, Mrs. Septimus Small let fall

no word, neither did she question June about him. In desperation the

girl asked at last whether Soames and Irene were in town--she had not

yet been to see anyone.

It was Aunt Hester who replied: Oh, yes, they were in town, they had not

been away at all. There was some little difficulty about the house, she

believed. June had heard, no doubt! She had better ask her Aunt Juley!

June turned to Mrs. Small, who sat upright in her chair, her hands

clasped, her face covered with innumerable pouts. In answer to the

girl's look she maintained a strange silence, and when she spoke it was

to ask June whether she had worn night-socks up in those high hotels

where it must be so cold of a night.

June answered that she had not, she hated the stuffy things; and rose to

leave.

Mrs. Small's infallibly chosen silence was far more ominous to her than

anything that could have been said.

Before half an hour was over she had dragged the truth from Mrs. Baynes

in Lowndes Square, that Soames was bringing an action against Bosinney

over the decoration of the house.

Instead of disturbing her, the news had a strangely calming effect; as

though she saw in the prospect of this struggle new hope for herself.

She learnt that the case was expected to come on in about a month, and

there seemed little or no prospect of Bosinney's success.

"And whatever he'll do I can't think," said Mrs. Baynes; "it's very

dreadful for him, you know--he's got no money--he's very hard up. And we

can't help him, I'm sure. I'm told the money-lenders won't lend if you

have no security, and he has none--none at all."

Her embonpoint had increased of late; she was in the full swing of

autumn organization, her writing-table literally strewn with the menus

of charity functions. She looked meaningly at June, with her round eyes

of parrot-grey.

The sudden flush that rose on the girl's intent young face--she must

have seen spring up before her a great hope--the sudden sweetness of

her smile, often came back to Lady Baynes in after years (Baynes was

knighted when he built that public Museum of Art which has given so much

employment to officials, and so little pleasure to those working classes

for whom it was designed).

The memory of that change, vivid and touching, like the breaking open

of a flower, or the first sun after long winter, the memory, too, of all

that came after, often intruded itself, unaccountably, inopportunely on

Lady Baynes, when her mind was set upon the most important things.

This was the very afternoon of the day that young Jolyon witnessed the

meeting in the Botanical Gardens, and on this day, too, old Jolyon

paid a visit to his solicitors, Forsyte, Bustard, and Forsyte, in the

Poultry. Soames was not in, he had gone down to Somerset House; Bustard

was buried up to the hilt in papers and that inaccessible apartment,

where he was judiciously placed, in order that he might do as much work

as possible; but James was in the front office, biting a finger, and

lugubriously turning over the pleadings in Forsyte v. Bosinney.

This sound lawyer had only a sort of luxurious dread of the 'nice

point,' enough to set up a pleasurable feeling of fuss; for his good

practical sense told him that if he himself were on the Bench he would

not pay much attention to it. But he was afraid that this Bosinney would

go bankrupt and Soames would have to find the money after all, and costs

into the bargain. And behind this tangible dread there was always

that intangible trouble, lurking in the background, intricate, dim,

scandalous, like a bad dream, and of which this action was but an

outward and visible sign.

He raised his head as old Jolyon came in, and muttered: "How are you,

Jolyon? Haven't seen you for an age. You've been to Switzerland, they

tell me. This young Bosinney, he's got himself into a mess. I knew how

it would be!" He held out the papers, regarding his elder brother with

nervous gloom.

Old Jolyon read them in silence, and while he read them James looked at

the floor, biting his fingers the while.

Old Jolyon pitched them down at last, and they fell with a thump

amongst a mass of affidavits in 're Buncombe, deceased,' one of the many

branches of that parent and profitable tree, 'Fryer v. Forsyte.'

"I don't know what Soames is about," he said, "to make a fuss over a few

hundred pounds. I thought he was a man of property."

James' long upper lip twitched angrily; he could not bear his son to be

attacked in such a spot.

"It's not the money," he began, but meeting his brother's glance,

direct, shrewd, judicial, he stopped.

There was a silence.

"I've come in for my Will," said old Jolyon at last, tugging at his

moustache.

James' curiosity was roused at once. Perhaps nothing in this life

was more stimulating to him than a Will; it was the supreme deal with

property, the final inventory of a man's belongings, the last word on

what he was worth. He sounded the bell.

"Bring in Mr. Jolyon's Will," he said to an anxious, dark-haired clerk.

"You going to make some alterations?" And through his mind there flashed

the thought: 'Now, am I worth as much as he?'

Old Jolyon put the Will in his breast pocket, and James twisted his long

legs regretfully.

"You've made some nice purchases lately, they tell me," he said.

"I don't know where you get your information from," answered old Jolyon

sharply. "When's this action coming on? Next month? I can't tell what

you've got in your minds. You must manage your own affairs; but if you

take my advice, you'll settle it out of Court. Good-bye!" With a cold

handshake he was gone.

James, his fixed grey-blue eye corkscrewing round some secret anxious

image, began again to bite his finger.

Old Jolyon took his Will to the offices of the New Colliery Company,

and sat down in the empty Board Room to read it through. He answered

'Down-by-the-starn' Hemmings so tartly when the latter, seeing his

Chairman seated there, entered with the new Superintendent's first

report, that the Secretary withdrew with regretful dignity; and sending

for the transfer clerk, blew him up till the poor youth knew not where

to look.

It was not--by George--as he (Down-by-the-starn) would have him know,

for a whippersnapper of a young fellow like him, to come down to that

office, and think that he was God Almighty. He (Down-by-the-starn) had

been head of that office for more years than a boy like him could count,

and if he thought that when he had finished all his work, he could sit

there doing nothing, he did not know him, Hemmings (Down-by-the-starn),

and so forth.

On the other side of the green baize door old Jolyon sat at the

long, mahogany-and-leather board table, his thick, loose-jointed,

tortoiseshell eye-glasses perched on the bridge of his nose, his gold

pencil moving down the clauses of his Will.

It was a simple affair, for there were none of those vexatious little

legacies and donations to charities, which fritter away a man's

possessions, and damage the majestic effect of that little paragraph in

the morning papers accorded to Forsytes who die with a hundred thousand

pounds.

A simple affair. Just a bequest to his son of twenty thousand, and

'as to the residue of my property of whatsoever kind whether realty or

personalty, or partaking of the nature of either--upon trust to pay the

proceeds rents annual produce dividends or interest thereof and thereon

to my said grand-daughter June Forsyte or her assigns during her life to

be for her sole use and benefit and without, etc... and from and after

her death or decease upon trust to convey assign transfer or make over

the said last-mentioned lands hereditaments premises trust moneys stocks

funds investments and securities or such as shall then stand for and

represent the same unto such person or persons whether one or more for

such intents purposes and uses and generally in such manner way and form

in all respects as the said June Forsyte notwithstanding coverture shall

by her last Will and Testament or any writing or writings in the nature

of a Will testament or testamentary disposition to be by her duly made

signed and published direct appoint or make over give and dispose of

the same And in default etc.... Provided always...' and so on, in seven

folios of brief and simple phraseology.

The Will had been drawn by James in his palmy days. He had foreseen

almost every contingency.

Old Jolyon sat a long time reading this Will; at last he took half a

sheet of paper from the rack, and made a prolonged pencil note; then

buttoning up the Will, he caused a cab to be called and drove to the

offices of Paramor and Herring, in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Jack Herring

was dead, but his nephew was still in the firm, and old Jolyon was

closeted with him for half an hour.

He had kept the hansom, and on coming out, gave the driver the

address--3, Wistaria Avenue.

He felt a strange, slow satisfaction, as though he had scored a victory

over James and the man of property. They should not poke their noses

into his affairs any more; he had just cancelled their trusteeships of

his Will; he would take the whole of his business out of their hands,

and put it into the hands of young Herring, and he would move the

business of his Companies too. If that young Soames were such a man of

property, he would never miss a thousand a year or so; and under his

great white moustache old Jolyon grimly smiled. He felt that what he was

doing was in the nature of retributive justice, richly deserved.

Slowly, surely, with the secret inner process that works the destruction

of an old tree, the poison of the wounds to his happiness, his will, his

pride, had corroded the comely edifice of his philosophy. Life had worn

him down on one side, till, like that family of which he was the head,

he had lost balance.

To him, borne northwards towards his son's house, the thought of the

new disposition of property, which he had just set in motion, appeared

vaguely in the light of a stroke of punishment, levelled at that

family and that Society, of which James and his son seemed to him

the representatives. He had made a restitution to young Jolyon,

and restitution to young Jolyon satisfied his secret craving for

revenge-revenge against Time, sorrow, and interference, against all that

incalculable sum of disapproval that had been bestowed by the world for

fifteen years on his only son. It presented itself as the one possible

way of asserting once more the domination of his will; of forcing James,

and Soames, and the family, and all those hidden masses of Forsytes--a

great stream rolling against the single dam of his obstinacy--to

recognise once and for all that he would be master. It was sweet to

think that at last he was going to make the boy a richer man by far than

that son of James, that 'man of property.' And it was sweet to give to

Jo, for he loved his son.

Neither young Jolyon nor his wife were in (young Jolyon indeed was not

back from the Botanical), but the little maid told him that she expected

the master at any moment:

"He's always at 'ome to tea, sir, to play with the children."

Old Jolyon said he would wait; and sat down patiently enough in the

faded, shabby drawing room, where, now that the summer chintzes

were removed, the old chairs and sofas revealed all their threadbare

deficiencies. He longed to send for the children; to have them there

beside him, their supple bodies against his knees; to hear Jolly's:

"Hallo, Gran!" and see his rush; and feel Holly's soft little hand

stealing up against his cheek. But he would not. There was solemnity

in what he had come to do, and until it was over he would not play. He

amused himself by thinking how with two strokes of his pen he was going

to restore the look of caste so conspicuously absent from everything

in that little house; how he could fill these rooms, or others in some

larger mansion, with triumphs of art from Baple and Pullbred's; how he

could send little Jolly to Harrow and Oxford (he no longer had faith in

Eton and Cambridge, for his son had been there); how he could procure

little Holly the best musical instruction, the child had a remarkable

aptitude.

As these visions crowded before him, causing emotion to swell his heart,

he rose, and stood at the window, looking down into the little walled

strip of garden, where the pear-tree, bare of leaves before its time,

stood with gaunt branches in the slow-gathering mist of the autumn

afternoon. The dog Balthasar, his tail curled tightly over a piebald,

furry back, was walking at the farther end, sniffing at the plants, and

at intervals placing his leg for support against the wall.

And old Jolyon mused.

What pleasure was there left but to give? It was pleasant to give, when

you could find one who would be thankful for what you gave--one of your

own flesh and blood! There was no such satisfaction to be had out of

giving to those who did not belong to you, to those who had no claim

on you! Such giving as that was a betrayal of the individualistic

convictions and actions of his life, of all his enterprise, his labour,

and his moderation, of the great and proud fact that, like tens of

thousands of Forsytes before him, tens of thousands in the present, tens

of thousands in the future, he had always made his own, and held his

own, in the world.

And, while he stood there looking down on the smut-covered foliage

of the laurels, the black-stained grass-plot, the progress of the dog

Balthasar, all the suffering of the fifteen years during which he had

been baulked of legitimate enjoyment mingled its gall with the sweetness

of the approaching moment.

Young Jolyon came at last, pleased with his work, and fresh from long

hours in the open air. On hearing that his father was in the drawing

room, he inquired hurriedly whether Mrs. Forsyte was at home, and being

informed that she was not, heaved a sigh of relief. Then putting his

painting materials carefully in the little coat-closet out of sight, he

went in.

With characteristic decision old Jolyon came at once to the point. "I've

been altering my arrangements, Jo," he said. "You can cut your coat a

bit longer in the future--I'm settling a thousand a year on you at once.

June will have fifty thousand at my death; and you the rest. That dog of

yours is spoiling the garden. I shouldn't keep a dog, if I were you!"

The dog Balthasar, seated in the centre of the lawn, was examining his

tail.

Young Jolyon looked at the animal, but saw him dimly, for his eyes were

misty.

"Yours won't come short of a hundred thousand, my boy," said old Jolyon;

"I thought you'd better know. I haven't much longer to live at my age. I

shan't allude to it again. How's your wife? And--give her my love."

Young Jolyon put his hand on his father's shoulder, and, as neither

spoke, the episode closed.

Having seen his father into a hansom, young Jolyon came back to the

drawing-room and stood, where old Jolyon had stood, looking down on

the little garden. He tried to realize all that this meant to him, and,

Forsyte that he was, vistas of property were opened out in his brain;

the years of half rations through which he had passed had not sapped his

natural instincts. In extremely practical form, he thought of travel,

of his wife's costume, the children's education, a pony for Jolly, a

thousand things; but in the midst of all he thought, too, of Bosinney

and his mistress, and the broken song of the thrush. Joy--tragedy!

Which? Which?

The old past--the poignant, suffering, passionate, wonderful past,

that no money could buy, that nothing could restore in all its burning

sweetness--had come back before him.

When his wife came in he went straight up to her and took her in his

arms; and for a long time he stood without speaking, his eyes closed,

pressing her to him, while she looked at him with a wondering, adoring,

doubting look in her eyes.

CHAPTER IV--VOYAGE INTO THE INFERNO

The morning after a certain night on which Soames at last asserted his

rights and acted like a man, he breakfasted alone.

He breakfasted by gaslight, the fog of late November wrapping the town

as in some monstrous blanket till the trees of the Square even were

barely visible from the dining-room window.

He ate steadily, but at times a sensation as though he could not swallow

attacked him. Had he been right to yield to his overmastering hunger of

the night before, and break down the resistance which he had suffered

now too long from this woman who was his lawful and solemnly constituted

helpmate?

He was strangely haunted by the recollection of her face, from before

which, to soothe her, he had tried to pull her hands--of her terrible

smothered sobbing, the like of which he had never heard, and still

seemed to hear; and he was still haunted by the odd, intolerable feeling

of remorse and shame he had felt, as he stood looking at her by the

flame of the single candle, before silently slinking away.

And somehow, now that he had acted like this, he was surprised at

himself.

Two nights before, at Winifred Dartie's, he had taken Mrs. MacAnder

into dinner. She had said to him, looking in his face with her

sharp, greenish eyes: "And so your wife is a great friend of that Mr.

Bosinney's?"

Not deigning to ask what she meant, he had brooded over her words.

They had roused in him a fierce jealousy, which, with the peculiar

perversion of this instinct, had turned to fiercer desire.

Without the incentive of Mrs. MacAnder's words he might never have done

what he had done. Without their incentive and the accident of finding

his wife's door for once unlocked, which had enabled him to steal upon

her asleep.

Slumber had removed his doubts, but the morning brought them again. One

thought comforted him: No one would know--it was not the sort of thing

that she would speak about.

And, indeed, when the vehicle of his daily business life, which needed

so imperatively the grease of clear and practical thought, started

rolling once more with the reading of his letters, those nightmare-like

doubts began to assume less extravagant importance at the back of his

mind. The incident was really not of great moment; women made a fuss

about it in books; but in the cool judgment of right-thinking men, of

men of the world, of such as he recollected often received praise in

the Divorce Court, he had but done his best to sustain the sanctity of

marriage, to prevent her from abandoning her duty, possibly, if she were

still seeing Bosinney, from....

No, he did not regret it.

Now that the first step towards reconciliation had been taken, the rest

would be comparatively--comparatively....

He, rose and walked to the window. His nerve had been shaken. The sound

of smothered sobbing was in his ears again. He could not get rid of it.

He put on his fur coat, and went out into the fog; having to go into the

City, he took the underground railway from Sloane Square station.

In his corner of the first-class compartment filled with City men the

smothered sobbing still haunted him, so he opened the Times with the

rich crackle that drowns all lesser sounds, and, barricaded behind it,

set himself steadily to con the news.

He read that a Recorder had charged a grand jury on the previous

day with a more than usually long list of offences. He read of three

murders, five manslaughters, seven arsons, and as many as eleven

rapes--a surprisingly high number--in addition to many less conspicuous

crimes, to be tried during a coming Sessions; and from one piece of news

he went on to another, keeping the paper well before his face.

And still, inseparable from his reading, was the memory of Irene's

tear-stained face, and the sounds from her broken heart.

The day was a busy one, including, in addition to the ordinary affairs

of his practice, a visit to his brokers, Messrs. Grin and Grinning, to

give them instructions to sell his shares in the New Colliery Co., Ltd.,

whose business he suspected, rather than knew, was stagnating (this

enterprise afterwards slowly declined, and was ultimately sold for a

song to an American syndicate); and a long conference at Waterbuck,

Q.C.'s chambers, attended by Boulter, by Fiske, the junior counsel, and

Waterbuck, Q.C., himself.

The case of Forsyte v. Bosinney was expected to be reached on the

morrow, before Mr. Justice Bentham.

Mr. Justice Bentham, a man of common-sense rather than too great legal

knowledge, was considered to be about the best man they could have to

try the action. He was a 'strong' Judge.

Waterbuck, Q.C., in pleasing conjunction with an almost rude neglect of

Boulter and Fiske paid to Soames a good deal of attention, by instinct

or the sounder evidence of rumour, feeling him to be a man of property.

He held with remarkable consistency to the opinion he had already

expressed in writing, that the issue would depend to a great extent on

the evidence given at the trial, and in a few well directed remarks he

advised Soames not to be too careful in giving that evidence. "A little

bluffness, Mr. Forsyte," he said, "a little bluffness," and after he had

spoken he laughed firmly, closed his lips tight, and scratched his head

just below where he had pushed his wig back, for all the world like

the gentleman-farmer for whom he loved to be taken. He was considered

perhaps the leading man in breach of promise cases.

Soames used the underground again in going home.

The fog was worse than ever at Sloane Square station. Through the

still, thick blur, men groped in and out; women, very few, grasped their

reticules to their bosoms and handkerchiefs to their mouths; crowned

with the weird excrescence of the driver, haloed by a vague glow

of lamp-light that seemed to drown in vapour before it reached the

pavement, cabs loomed dim-shaped ever and again, and discharged

citizens, bolting like rabbits to their burrows.

And these shadowy figures, wrapped each in his own little shroud of

fog, took no notice of each other. In the great warren, each rabbit for

himself, especially those clothed in the more expensive fur, who, afraid

of carriages on foggy days, are driven underground.

One figure, however, not far from Soames, waited at the station door.

Some buccaneer or lover, of whom each Forsyte thought: 'Poor devil!

looks as if he were having a bad time!' Their kind hearts beat a stroke

faster for that poor, waiting, anxious lover in the fog; but they

hurried by, well knowing that they had neither time nor money to spare

for any suffering but their own.

Only a policeman, patrolling slowly and at intervals, took an interest

in that waiting figure, the brim of whose slouch hat half hid a face

reddened by the cold, all thin, and haggard, over which a hand stole now

and again to smooth away anxiety, or renew the resolution that kept

him waiting there. But the waiting lover (if lover he were) was used

to policemen's scrutiny, or too absorbed in his anxiety, for he never

flinched. A hardened case, accustomed to long trysts, to anxiety, and

fog, and cold, if only his mistress came at last. Foolish lover! Fogs

last until the spring; there is also snow and rain, no comfort anywhere;

gnawing fear if you bring her out, gnawing fear if you bid her stay at

home!

"Serve him right; he should arrange his affairs better!"

So any respectable Forsyte. Yet, if that sounder citizen could have

listened at the waiting lover's heart, out there in the fog and the

cold, he would have said again: "Yes, poor devil he's having a bad

time!"

Soames got into his cab, and, with the glass down, crept along Sloane

Street, and so along the Brompton Road, and home. He reached his house

at five.

His wife was not in. She had gone out a quarter of an hour before. Out

at such a time of night, into this terrible fog! What was the meaning of

that?

He sat by the dining-room fire, with the door open, disturbed to the

soul, trying to read the evening paper. A book was no good--in daily

papers alone was any narcotic to such worry as his. From the customary

events recorded in the journal he drew some comfort. 'Suicide of

an actress'--'Grave indisposition of a Statesman' (that chronic

sufferer)--'Divorce of an army officer'--'Fire in a colliery'--he read

them all. They helped him a little--prescribed by the greatest of all

doctors, our natural taste.

It was nearly seven when he heard her come in.

The incident of the night before had long lost its importance under

stress of anxiety at her strange sortie into the fog. But now that Irene

was home, the memory of her broken-hearted sobbing came back to him, and

he felt nervous at the thought of facing her.

She was already on the stairs; her grey fur coat hung to her knees, its

high collar almost hid her face, she wore a thick veil.

She neither turned to look at him nor spoke. No ghost or stranger could

have passed more silently.

Bilson came to lay dinner, and told him that Mrs. Forsyte was not coming

down; she was having the soup in her room.

For once Soames did not 'change'; it was, perhaps, the first time in

his life that he had sat down to dinner with soiled cuffs, and, not even

noticing them, he brooded long over his wine. He sent Bilson to light a

fire in his picture-room, and presently went up there himself.

Turning on the gas, he heaved a deep sigh, as though amongst these

treasures, the backs of which confronted him in stacks, around the

little room, he had found at length his peace of mind. He went straight

up to the greatest treasure of them all, an undoubted Turner, and,

carrying it to the easel, turned its face to the light. There had been

a movement in Turners, but he had not been able to make up his mind

to part with it. He stood for a long time, his pale, clean-shaven face

poked forward above his stand-up collar, looking at the picture as

though he were adding it up; a wistful expression came into his eyes;

he found, perhaps, that it came to too little. He took it down from

the easel to put it back against the wall; but, in crossing the room,

stopped, for he seemed to hear sobbing.

It was nothing--only the sort of thing that had been bothering him in

the morning. And soon after, putting the high guard before the blazing

fire, he stole downstairs.

Fresh for the morrow! was his thought. It was long before he went to

sleep....

It is now to George Forsyte that the mind must turn for light on the

events of that fog-engulfed afternoon.

The wittiest and most sportsmanlike of the Forsytes had passed the day

reading a novel in the paternal mansion at Princes' Gardens. Since a

recent crisis in his financial affairs he had been kept on parole by

Roger, and compelled to reside 'at home.'

Towards five o'clock he went out, and took train at South Kensington

Station (for everyone to-day went Underground). His intention was to

dine, and pass the evening playing billiards at the Red Pottle--that

unique hostel, neither club, hotel, nor good gilt restaurant.

He got out at Charing Cross, choosing it in preference to his more usual

St. James's Park, that he might reach Jermyn Street by better lighted

ways.

On the platform his eyes--for in combination with a composed and

fashionable appearance, George had sharp eyes, and was always on the

look-out for fillips to his sardonic humour--his eyes were attracted

by a man, who, leaping from a first-class compartment, staggered rather

than walked towards the exit.

'So ho, my bird!' said George to himself; 'why, it's "the Buccaneer!"'

and he put his big figure on the trail. Nothing afforded him greater

amusement than a drunken man.

Bosinney, who wore a slouch hat, stopped in front of him, spun around,

and rushed back towards the carriage he had just left. He was too late.

A porter caught him by the coat; the train was already moving on.

George's practised glance caught sight of the face of a lady clad in

a grey fur coat at the carriage window. It was Mrs. Soames--and George

felt that this was interesting!

And now he followed Bosinney more closely than ever--up the stairs, past

the ticket collector into the street. In that progress, however, his

feelings underwent a change; no longer merely curious and amused, he

felt sorry for the poor fellow he was shadowing. 'The Buccaneer' was not

drunk, but seemed to be acting under the stress of violent emotion; he

was talking to himself, and all that George could catch were the words

"Oh, God!" Nor did he appear to know what he was doing, or where going;

but stared, hesitated, moved like a man out of his mind; and from being

merely a joker in search of amusement, George felt that he must see the

poor chap through.

He had 'taken the knock'--'taken the knock!' And he wondered what on

earth Mrs. Soames had been saying, what on earth she had been telling

him in the railway carriage. She had looked bad enough herself! It made

George sorry to think of her travelling on with her trouble all alone.

He followed close behind Bosinney's elbow--tall, burly figure, saying

nothing, dodging warily--and shadowed him out into the fog.

There was something here beyond a jest! He kept his head admirably, in

spite of some excitement, for in addition to compassion, the instincts

of the chase were roused within him.

Bosinney walked right out into the thoroughfare--a vast muffled

blackness, where a man could not see six paces before him; where, all

around, voices or whistles mocked the sense of direction; and sudden

shapes came rolling slow upon them; and now and then a light showed like

a dim island in an infinite dark sea.

And fast into this perilous gulf of night walked Bosinney, and fast

after him walked George. If the fellow meant to put his 'twopenny' under

a 'bus, he would stop it if he could! Across the street and back the

hunted creature strode, not groping as other men were groping in that

gloom, but driven forward as though the faithful George behind wielded

a knout; and this chase after a haunted man began to have for George the

strangest fascination.

But it was now that the affair developed in a way which ever afterwards

caused it to remain green in his mind. Brought to a stand-still in the

fog, he heard words which threw a sudden light on these proceedings.

What Mrs. Soames had said to Bosinney in the train was now no longer

dark. George understood from those mutterings that Soames had exercised

his rights over an estranged and unwilling wife in the greatest--the

supreme act of property.

His fancy wandered in the fields of this situation; it impressed him;

he guessed something of the anguish, the sexual confusion and horror in

Bosinney's heart. And he thought: 'Yes, it's a bit thick! I don't wonder

the poor fellow is half-cracked!'

He had run his quarry to earth on a bench under one of the lions in

Trafalgar Square, a monster sphynx astray like themselves in that gulf

of darkness. Here, rigid and silent, sat Bosinney, and George, in whose

patience was a touch of strange brotherliness, took his stand behind.

He was not lacking in a certain delicacy--a sense of form--that did not

permit him to intrude upon this tragedy, and he waited, quiet as the

lion above, his fur collar hitched above his ears concealing the fleshy

redness of his cheeks, concealing all but his eyes with their sardonic,

compassionate stare. And men kept passing back from business on the way

to their clubs--men whose figures shrouded in cocoons of fog came

into view like spectres, and like spectres vanished. Then even in his

compassion George's Quilpish humour broke forth in a sudden longing to

pluck these spectres by the sleeve, and say:

"Hi, you Johnnies! You don't often see a show like this! Here's a poor

devil whose mistress has just been telling him a pretty little story of

her husband; walk up, walk up! He's taken the knock, you see."

In fancy he saw them gaping round the tortured lover; and grinned as he

thought of some respectable, newly-married spectre enabled by the state

of his own affections to catch an inkling of what was going on within

Bosinney; he fancied he could see his mouth getting wider and wider, and

the fog going down and down. For in George was all that contempt of the

middle-class-âespecially of the married middle-class-âpeculiar to the

wild and sportsmanlike spirits in its ranks.

But he began to be bored. Waiting was not what he had bargained for.

'After all,' he thought, 'the poor chap will get over it; not the first

time such a thing has happened in this little city!' But now his quarry

again began muttering words of violent hate and anger. And following a

sudden impulse George touched him on the shoulder.

Bosinney spun round.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

George could have stood it well enough in the light of the gas lamps, in

the light of that everyday world of which he was so hardy a connoisseur;

but in this fog, where all was gloomy and unreal, where nothing had that

matter-of-fact value associated by Forsytes with earth, he was a victim

to strange qualms, and as he tried to stare back into the eyes of this

maniac, he thought:

'If I see a bobby, I'll hand him over; he's not fit to be at large.'

But waiting for no answer, Bosinney strode off into the fog, and George

followed, keeping perhaps a little further off, yet more than ever set

on tracking him down.

'He can't go on long like this,' he thought. 'It's God's own miracle

he's not been run over already.' He brooded no more on policemen, a

sportsman's sacred fire alive again within him.

Into a denser gloom than ever Bosinney held on at a furious pace; but

his pursuer perceived more method in his madness--he was clearly making

his way westwards.

'He's really going for Soames!' thought George. The idea was attractive.

It would be a sporting end to such a chase. He had always disliked his

cousin.

The shaft of a passing cab brushed against his shoulder and made him

leap aside. He did not intend to be killed for the Buccaneer, or anyone.

Yet, with hereditary tenacity, he stuck to the trail through vapour that

blotted out everything but the shadow of the hunted man and the dim moon

of the nearest lamp.

Then suddenly, with the instinct of a town-stroller, George knew himself

to be in Piccadilly. Here he could find his way blindfold; and freed

from the strain of geographical uncertainty, his mind returned to

Bosinney's trouble.

Down the long avenue of his man-about-town experience, bursting, as it

were, through a smirch of doubtful amours, there stalked to him a memory

of his youth. A memory, poignant still, that brought the scent of hay,

the gleam of moonlight, a summer magic, into the reek and blackness of

this London fog--the memory of a night when in the darkest shadow of

a lawn he had overheard from a woman's lips that he was not her sole

possessor. And for a moment George walked no longer in black

Piccadilly, but lay again, with hell in his heart, and his face to the

sweet-smelling, dewy grass, in the long shadow of poplars that hid the

moon.

A longing seized him to throw his arm round the Buccaneer, and say,

"Come, old boy. Time cures all. Let's go and drink it off!"

But a voice yelled at him, and he started back. A cab rolled out of

blackness, and into blackness disappeared. And suddenly George perceived

that he had lost Bosinney. He ran forward and back, felt his heart

clutched by a sickening fear, the dark fear which lives in the wings

of the fog. Perspiration started out on his brow. He stood quite still,

listening with all his might.

"And then," as he confided to Dartie the same evening in the course of a

game of billiards at the Red Pottle, "I lost him."

Dartie twirled complacently at his dark moustache. He had just put

together a neat break of twenty-three,--failing at a 'Jenny.' "And who

was she?" he asked.

George looked slowly at the 'man of the world's' fattish, sallow face,

and a little grim smile lurked about the curves of his cheeks and his

heavy-lidded eyes.

'No, no, my fine fellow,' he thought, 'I'm not going to tell you.' For

though he mixed with Dartie a good deal, he thought him a bit of a cad.

"Oh, some little love-lady or other," he said, and chalked his cue.

"A love-lady!" exclaimed Dartie--he used a more figurative expression.

"I made sure it was our friend Soa...."

"Did you?" said George curtly. "Then damme you've made an error."

He missed his shot. He was careful not to allude to the subject again

till, towards eleven o'clock, having, in his poetic phraseology, 'looked

upon the drink when it was yellow,' he drew aside the blind, and gazed

out into the street. The murky blackness of the fog was but faintly

broken by the lamps of the 'Red Pottle,' and no shape of mortal man or

thing was in sight.

"I can't help thinking of that poor Buccaneer," he said. "He may be

wandering out there now in that fog. If he's not a corpse," he added

with strange dejection.

"Corpse!" said Dartie, in whom the recollection of his defeat at

Richmond flared up. "He's all right. Ten to one if he wasn't tight!"

George turned on him, looking really formidable, with a sort of savage

gloom on his big face.

"Dry up!" he said. "Don't I tell you he's 'taken the knock!"'

CHAPTER V--THE TRIAL

In the morning of his case, which was second in the list, Soames was

again obliged to start without seeing Irene, and it was just as well,

for he had not as yet made up his mind what attitude to adopt towards

her.

He had been requested to be in court by half-past ten, to provide

against the event of the first action (a breach of promise) collapsing,

which however it did not, both sides showing a courage that afforded

Waterbuck, Q.C., an opportunity for improving his already great

reputation in this class of case. He was opposed by Ram, the other

celebrated breach of promise man. It was a battle of giants.

The court delivered judgment just before the luncheon interval. The jury

left the box for good, and Soames went out to get something to eat. He

met James standing at the little luncheon-bar, like a pelican in the

wilderness of the galleries, bent over a sandwich with a glass of sherry

before him. The spacious emptiness of the great central hall, over which

father and son brooded as they stood together, was marred now and then

for a fleeting moment by barristers in wig and gown hurriedly bolting

across, by an occasional old lady or rusty-coated man, looking up in a

frightened way, and by two persons, bolder than their generation, seated

in an embrasure arguing. The sound of their voices arose, together with

a scent as of neglected wells, which, mingling with the odour of the

galleries, combined to form the savour, like nothing but the emanation

of a refined cheese, so indissolubly connected with the administration

of British Justice.

It was not long before James addressed his son.

"When's your case coming on? I suppose it'll be on directly. I shouldn't

wonder if this Bosinney'd say anything; I should think he'd have to.

He'll go bankrupt if it goes against him." He took a large bite at his

sandwich and a mouthful of sherry. "Your mother," he said, "wants you

and Irene to come and dine to-night."

A chill smile played round Soames' lips; he looked back at his father.

Anyone who had seen the look, cold and furtive, thus interchanged, might

have been pardoned for not appreciating the real understanding between

them. James finished his sherry at a draught.

"How much?" he asked.

On returning to the court Soames took at once his rightful seat on the

front bench beside his solicitor. He ascertained where his father was

seated with a glance so sidelong as to commit nobody.

James, sitting back with his hands clasped over the handle of his

umbrella, was brooding on the end of the bench immediately behind

counsel, whence he could get away at once when the case was over. He

considered Bosinney's conduct in every way outrageous, but he did not

wish to run up against him, feeling that the meeting would be awkward.

Next to the Divorce Court, this court was, perhaps, the favourite

emporium of justice, libel, breach of promise, and other commercial

actions being frequently decided there. Quite a sprinkling of persons

unconnected with the law occupied the back benches, and the hat of a

woman or two could be seen in the gallery.

The two rows of seats immediately in front of James were gradually

filled by barristers in wigs, who sat down to make pencil notes, chat,

and attend to their teeth; but his interest was soon diverted from these

lesser lights of justice by the entrance of Waterbuck, Q.C., with the

wings of his silk gown rustling, and his red, capable face supported

by two short, brown whiskers. The famous Q.C. looked, as James freely

admitted, the very picture of a man who could heckle a witness.

For all his experience, it so happened that he had never seen Waterbuck,

Q.C., before, and, like many Forsytes in the lower branch of the

profession, he had an extreme admiration for a good cross-examiner. The

long, lugubrious folds in his cheeks relaxed somewhat after seeing him,

especially as he now perceived that Soames alone was represented by

silk.

Waterbuck, Q.C., had barely screwed round on his elbow to chat with

his Junior before Mr. Justice Bentham himself appeared--a thin, rather

hen-like man, with a little stoop, clean-shaven under his snowy wig.

Like all the rest of the court, Waterbuck rose, and remained on his

feet until the judge was seated. James rose but slightly; he was already

comfortable, and had no opinion of Bentham, having sat next but one to

him at dinner twice at the Bumley Tomms'. Bumley Tomm was rather a poor

thing, though he had been so successful. James himself had given him

his first brief. He was excited, too, for he had just found out that

Bosinney was not in court.

'Now, what's he mean by that?' he kept on thinking.

The case having been called on, Waterbuck, Q.C., pushing back his

papers, hitched his gown on his shoulder, and, with a semi-circular

look around him, like a man who is going to bat, arose and addressed the

Court.

The facts, he said, were not in dispute, and all that his Lordship

would be asked was to interpret the correspondence which had taken place

between his client and the defendant, an architect, with reference

to the decoration of a house. He would, however, submit that this

correspondence could only mean one very plain thing. After briefly

reciting the history of the house at Robin Hill, which he described as a

mansion, and the actual facts of expenditure, he went on as follows:

"My client, Mr. Soames Forsyte, is a gentleman, a man of property, who

would be the last to dispute any legitimate claim that might be made

against him, but he has met with such treatment from his architect in

the matter of this house, over which he has, as your lordship has

heard, already spent some twelve--some twelve thousand pounds, a sum

considerably in advance of the amount he had originally contemplated,

that as a matter of principle--and this I cannot too strongly

emphasize--as a matter of principle, and in the interests of others, he

has felt himself compelled to bring this action. The point put forward

in defence by the architect I will suggest to your lordship is

not worthy of a moment's serious consideration." He then read the

correspondence.

His client, "a man of recognised position," was prepared to go into the

box, and to swear that he never did authorize, that it was never in his

mind to authorize, the expenditure of any money beyond the extreme limit

of twelve thousand and fifty pounds, which he had clearly fixed; and

not further to waste the time of the court, he would at once call Mr.

Forsyte.

Soames then went into the box. His whole appearance was striking in its

composure. His face, just supercilious enough, pale and clean-shaven,

with a little line between the eyes, and compressed lips; his dress

in unostentatious order, one hand neatly gloved, the other bare. He

answered the questions put to him in a somewhat low, but distinct voice.

His evidence under cross-examination savoured of taciturnity.

Had he not used the expression, "a free hand"? No.

"Come, come!"

The expression he had used was 'a free hand in the terms of this

correspondence.'

"Would you tell the Court that that was English?"

"Yes!"

"What do you say it means?"

"What it says!"

"Are you prepared to deny that it is a contradiction in terms?"

"Yes."

"You are not an Irishman?"

"No."

"Are you a well-educated man?"

"Yes."

"And yet you persist in that statement?"

"Yes."

Throughout this and much more cross-examination, which turned again and

again around the 'nice point,' James sat with his hand behind his ear,

his eyes fixed upon his son.

He was proud of him! He could not but feel that in similar circumstances

he himself would have been tempted to enlarge his replies, but his

instinct told him that this taciturnity was the very thing. He sighed

with relief, however, when Soames, slowly turning, and without any

change of expression, descended from the box.

When it came to the turn of Bosinney's Counsel to address the Judge,

James redoubled his attention, and he searched the Court again and again

to see if Bosinney were not somewhere concealed.

Young Chankery began nervously; he was placed by Bosinney's absence in

an awkward position. He therefore did his best to turn that absence to

account.

He could not but fear--he said--that his client had met with an

accident. He had fully expected him there to give evidence; they had

sent round that morning both to Mr. Bosinney's office and to his rooms

(though he knew they were one and the same, he thought it was as

well not to say so), but it was not known where he was, and this he

considered to be ominous, knowing how anxious Mr. Bosinney had been to

give his evidence. He had not, however, been instructed to apply for an

adjournment, and in default of such instruction he conceived it his duty

to go on. The plea on which he somewhat confidently relied, and which

his client, had he not unfortunately been prevented in some way from

attending, would have supported by his evidence, was that such an

expression as a 'free hand' could not be limited, fettered, and rendered

unmeaning, by any verbiage which might follow it. He would go further

and say that the correspondence showed that whatever he might have said

in his evidence, Mr. Forsyte had in fact never contemplated repudiating

liability on any of the work ordered or executed by his architect. The

defendant had certainly never contemplated such a contingency, or, as

was demonstrated by his letters, he would never have proceeded with

the work--a work of extreme delicacy, carried out with great care and

efficiency, to meet and satisfy the fastidious taste of a connoisseur, a

rich man, a man of property. He felt strongly on this point, and feeling

strongly he used, perhaps, rather strong words when he said that this

action was of a most unjustifiable, unexpected, indeed--unprecedented

character. If his Lordship had had the opportunity that he himself had

made it his duty to take, to go over this very fine house and see the

great delicacy and beauty of the decorations executed by his client--an

artist in his most honourable profession--he felt convinced that not for

one moment would his Lordship tolerate this, he would use no stronger

word than daring attempt to evade legitimate responsibility.

Taking the text of Soames' letters, he lightly touched on 'Boileau v.

The Blasted Cement Company, Limited.' "It is doubtful," he said, "what

that authority has decided; in any case I would submit that it is just

as much in my favour as in my friend's." He then argued the 'nice

point' closely. With all due deference he submitted that Mr. Forsyte's

expression nullified itself. His client not being a rich man, the matter

was a serious one for him; he was a very talented architect, whose

professional reputation was undoubtedly somewhat at stake. He concluded

with a perhaps too personal appeal to the Judge, as a lover of the arts,

to show himself the protector of artists, from what was occasionally--he

said occasionally--the too iron hand of capital. "What," he said, "will

be the position of the artistic professions, if men of property like

this Mr. Forsyte refuse, and are allowed to refuse, to carry out the

obligations of the commissions which they have given." He would now call

his client, in case he should at the last moment have found himself able

to be present.

The name Philip Baynes Bosinney was called three times by the Ushers,

and the sound of the calling echoed with strange melancholy throughout

the Court and Galleries.

The crying of this name, to which no answer was returned, had upon

James a curious effect: it was like calling for your lost dog about

the streets. And the creepy feeling that it gave him, of a man missing,

grated on his sense of comfort and security-on his cosiness. Though he

could not have said why, it made him feel uneasy.

He looked now at the clock--a quarter to three! It would be all over in

a quarter of an hour. Where could the young fellow be?

It was only when Mr. Justice Bentham delivered judgment that he got over

the turn he had received.

Behind the wooden erection, by which he was fenced from more ordinary

mortals, the learned Judge leaned forward. The electric light, just

turned on above his head, fell on his face, and mellowed it to an orange

hue beneath the snowy crown of his wig; the amplitude of his robes grew

before the eye; his whole figure, facing the comparative dusk of the

Court, radiated like some majestic and sacred body. He cleared his

throat, took a sip of water, broke the nib of a quill against the desk,

and, folding his bony hands before him, began.

To James he suddenly loomed much larger than he had ever thought Bentham

would loom. It was the majesty of the law; and a person endowed with

a nature far less matter-of-fact than that of James might have been

excused for failing to pierce this halo, and disinter therefrom the

somewhat ordinary Forsyte, who walked and talked in every-day life under

the name of Sir Walter Bentham.

He delivered judgment in the following words:

"The facts in this case are not in dispute. On May 15 last the defendant

wrote to the plaintiff, requesting to be allowed to withdraw from his

professional position in regard to the decoration of the plaintiff's

house, unless he were given 'a free hand.' The plaintiff, on May 17,

wrote back as follows: 'In giving you, in accordance with your request,

this free hand, I wish you to clearly understand that the total cost of

the house as handed over to me completely decorated, inclusive of your

fee (as arranged between us) must not exceed twelve thousand pounds.' To

this letter the defendant replied on May 18: 'If you think that in such

a delicate matter as decoration I can bind myself to the exact pound, I

am afraid you are mistaken.' On May 19 the plaintiff wrote as follows:

'I did not mean to say that if you should exceed the sum named in my

letter to you by ten or twenty or even fifty pounds there would be

any difficulty between us. You have a free hand in the terms of this

correspondence, and I hope you will see your way to completing the

decorations.' On May 20 the defendant replied thus shortly: 'Very well.'

"In completing these decorations, the defendant incurred liabilities

and expenses which brought the total cost of this house up to the sum of

twelve thousand four hundred pounds, all of which expenditure has been

defrayed by the plaintiff. This action has been brought by the plaintiff

to recover from the defendant the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds

expended by him in excess of a sum of twelve thousand and fifty pounds,

alleged by the plaintiff to have been fixed by this correspondence as

the maximum sum that the defendant had authority to expend.

"The question for me to decide is whether or no the defendant is liable

to refund to the plaintiff this sum. In my judgment he is so liable.

"What in effect the plaintiff has said is this 'I give you a free hand

to complete these decorations, provided that you keep within a total

cost to me of twelve thousand pounds. If you exceed that sum by as much

as fifty pounds, I will not hold you responsible; beyond that point you

are no agent of mine, and I shall repudiate liability.' It is not quite

clear to me whether, had the plaintiff in fact repudiated liability

under his agent's contracts, he would, under all the circumstances, have

been successful in so doing; but he has not adopted this course. He

has accepted liability, and fallen back upon his rights against the

defendant under the terms of the latter's engagement.

"In my judgment the plaintiff is entitled to recover this sum from the

defendant.

"It has been sought, on behalf of the defendant, to show that no limit

of expenditure was fixed or intended to be fixed by this correspondence.

If this were so, I can find no reason for the plaintiff's importation

into the correspondence of the figures of twelve thousand pounds and

subsequently of fifty pounds. The defendant's contention would render

these figures meaningless. It is manifest to me that by his letter of

May 20 he assented to a very clear proposition, by the terms of which he

must be held to be bound.

"For these reasons there will be judgment for the plaintiff for the

amount claimed with costs."

James sighed, and stooping, picked up his umbrella which had fallen with

a rattle at the words 'importation into this correspondence.'

Untangling his legs, he rapidly left the Court; without waiting for his

son, he snapped up a hansom cab (it was a clear, grey afternoon) and

drove straight to Timothy's where he found Swithin; and to him, Mrs.

Septimus Small, and Aunt Hester, he recounted the whole proceedings,

eating two muffins not altogether in the intervals of speech.

"Soames did very well," he ended; "he's got his head screwed on the

right way. This won't please Jolyon. It's a bad business for that young

Bosinney; he'll go bankrupt, I shouldn't wonder," and then after a long

pause, during which he had stared disquietly into the fire, he added:

"He wasn't there--now why?"

There was a sound of footsteps. The figure of a thick-set man, with the

ruddy brown face of robust health, was seen in the back drawing-room.

The forefinger of his upraised hand was outlined against the black of

his frock coat. He spoke in a grudging voice.

"Well, James," he said, "I can't--I can't stop," and turning round, he

walked out.

It was Timothy.

James rose from his chair. "There!" he said, "there! I knew there was

something wro...." He checked himself, and was silent, staring before

him, as though he had seen a portent.

CHAPTER VI--SOAMES BREAKS THE NEWS

In leaving the Court Soames did not go straight home. He felt

disinclined for the City, and drawn by need for sympathy in his triumph,

he, too, made his way, but slowly and on foot, to Timothy's in the

Bayswater Road.

His father had just left; Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester, in possession of

the whole story, greeted him warmly. They were sure he was hungry after

all that evidence. Smither should toast him some more muffins, his dear

father had eaten them all. He must put his legs up on the sofa; and he

must have a glass of prune brandy too. It was so strengthening.

Swithin was still present, having lingered later than his wont, for he

felt in want of exercise. On hearing this suggestion, he 'pished.' A

pretty pass young men were coming to! His own liver was out of order,

and he could not bear the thought of anyone else drinking prune brandy.

He went away almost immediately, saying to Soames: "And how's your wife?

You tell her from me that if she's dull, and likes to come and dine with

me quietly, I'll give her such a bottle of champagne as she doesn't get

every day." Staring down from his height on Soames he contracted his

thick, puffy, yellow hand as though squeezing within it all this small

fry, and throwing out his chest he waddled slowly away.

Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester were left horrified. Swithin was so droll!

They themselves were longing to ask Soames how Irene would take the

result, yet knew that they must not; he would perhaps say something

of his own accord, to throw some light on this, the present burning

question in their lives, the question that from necessity of silence

tortured them almost beyond bearing; for even Timothy had now been told,

and the effect on his health was little short of alarming. And what,

too, would June do? This, also, was a most exciting, if dangerous

speculation!

They had never forgotten old Jolyon's visit, since when he had not once

been to see them; they had never forgotten the feeling it gave all who

were present, that the family was no longer what it had been--that the

family was breaking up.

But Soames gave them no help, sitting with his knees crossed, talking of

the Barbizon school of painters, whom he had just discovered. These were

the coming men, he said; he should not wonder if a lot of money were

made over them; he had his eye on two pictures by a man called Corot,

charming things; if he could get them at a reasonable price he was going

to buy them--they would, he thought, fetch a big price some day.

Interested as they could not but be, neither Mrs. Septimus Small nor

Aunt Hester could entirely acquiesce in being thus put off.

It was interesting--most interesting--and then Soames was so clever

that they were sure he would do something with those pictures if anybody

could; but what was his plan now that he had won his case; was he going

to leave London at once, and live in the country, or what was he going

to do?

Soames answered that he did not know, he thought they should be moving

soon. He rose and kissed his aunts.

No sooner had Aunt Juley received this emblem of departure than a change

came over her, as though she were being visited by dreadful courage;

every little roll of flesh on her face seemed trying to escape from an

invisible, confining mask.

She rose to the full extent of her more than medium height, and said:

"It has been on my mind a long time, dear, and if nobody else will tell

you, I have made up my mind that...."

Aunt Hester interrupted her: "Mind, Julia, you do it...." she

gasped--"on your own responsibility!"

Mrs. Small went on as though she had not heard: "I think you ought to

know, dear, that Mrs. MacAnder saw Irene walking in Richmond Park with

Mr. Bosinney."

Aunt Hester, who had also risen, sank back in her chair, and turned

her face away. Really Juley was too--she should not do such things when

she--Aunt Hester, was in the room; and, breathless with anticipation,

she waited for what Soames would answer.

He had flushed the peculiar flush which always centred between his eyes;

lifting his hand, and, as it were, selecting a finger, he bit a nail

delicately; then, drawling it out between set lips, he said: "Mrs.

MacAnder is a cat!"

Without waiting for any reply, he left the room.

When he went into Timothy's he had made up his mind what course to

pursue on getting home. He would go up to Irene and say:

"Well, I've won my case, and there's an end of it! I don't want to be

hard on Bosinney; I'll see if we can't come to some arrangement; he

shan't be pressed. And now let's turn over a new leaf! We'll let the

house, and get out of these fogs. We'll go down to Robin Hill at once.

I--I never meant to be rough with you! Let's shake hands--and--" Perhaps

she would let him kiss her, and forget!

When he came out of Timothy's his intentions were no longer so simple.

The smouldering jealousy and suspicion of months blazed up within him.

He would put an end to that sort of thing once and for all; he would not

have her drag his name in the dirt! If she could not or would not love

him, as was her duty and his right--she should not play him tricks with

anyone else! He would tax her with it; threaten to divorce her! That

would make her behave; she would never face that. But--but--what if she

did? He was staggered; this had not occurred to him.

What if she did? What if she made him a confession? How would he stand

then? He would have to bring a divorce!

A divorce! Thus close, the word was paralyzing, so utterly at variance

with all the principles that had hitherto guided his life. Its lack of

compromise appalled him; he felt--like the captain of a ship, going to

the side of his vessel, and, with his own hands throwing over the most

precious of his bales. This jettisoning of his property with his own

hand seemed uncanny to Soames. It would injure him in his profession: He

would have to get rid of the house at Robin Hill, on which he had spent

so much money, so much anticipation--and at a sacrifice. And she! She

would no longer belong to him, not even in name! She would pass out of

his life, and he--he should never see her again!

He traversed in the cab the length of a street without getting beyond

the thought that he should never see her again!

But perhaps there was nothing to confess, even now very likely there was

nothing to confess. Was it wise to push things so far? Was it wise to

put himself into a position where he might have to eat his words? The

result of this case would ruin Bosinney; a ruined man was desperate,

but--what could he do? He might go abroad, ruined men always went

abroad. What could they do--if indeed it was 'they'--without money? It

would be better to wait and see how things turned out. If necessary,

he could have her watched. The agony of his jealousy (for all the world

like the crisis of an aching tooth) came on again; and he almost cried

out. But he must decide, fix on some course of action before he got

home. When the cab drew up at the door, he had decided nothing.

He entered, pale, his hands moist with perspiration, dreading to meet

her, burning to meet her, ignorant of what he was to say or do.

The maid Bilson was in the hall, and in answer to his question: "Where

is your mistress?" told him that Mrs. Forsyte had left the house about

noon, taking with her a trunk and bag.

Snatching the sleeve of his fur coat away from her grasp, he confronted

her:

"What?" he exclaimed; "what's that you said?" Suddenly recollecting that

he must not betray emotion, he added: "What message did she leave?" and

noticed with secret terror the startled look of the maid's eyes.

"Mrs. Forsyte left no message, sir."

"No message; very well, thank you, that will do. I shall be dining out."

The maid went downstairs, leaving him still in his fur coat, idly

turning over the visiting cards in the porcelain bowl that stood on the

carved oak rug chest in the hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Bareham Culcher. Mrs. Septimus Small. Mrs. Baynes. Mr.

Solomon Thornworthy. Lady Bellis. Miss Hermione Bellis. Miss Winifred

Bellis. Miss Ella Bellis.

Who the devil were all these people? He seemed to have forgotten all

familiar things. The words 'no message--a trunk, and a bag,' played

a hide-and-seek in his brain. It was incredible that she had left no

message, and, still in his fur coat, he ran upstairs two steps at a

time, as a young married man when he comes home will run up to his

wife's room.

Everything was dainty, fresh, sweet-smelling; everything in perfect

order. On the great bed with its lilac silk quilt, was the bag she had

made and embroidered with her own hands to hold her sleeping things; her

slippers ready at the foot; the sheets even turned over at the head as

though expecting her.

On the table stood the silver-mounted brushes and bottles from her

dressing bag, his own present. There must, then, be some mistake. What

bag had she taken? He went to the bell to summon Bilson, but remembered

in time that he must assume knowledge of where Irene had gone, take it

all as a matter of course, and grope out the meaning for himself.

He locked the doors, and tried to think, but felt his brain going round;

and suddenly tears forced themselves into his eyes.

Hurriedly pulling off his coat, he looked at himself in the mirror.

He was too pale, a greyish tinge all over his face; he poured out water,

and began feverishly washing.

Her silver-mounted brushes smelt faintly of the perfumed lotion she used

for her hair; and at this scent the burning sickness of his jealousy

seized him again.

Struggling into his fur, he ran downstairs and out into the street.

He had not lost all command of himself, however, and as he went down

Sloane Street he framed a story for use, in case he should not find her

at Bosinney's. But if he should? His power of decision again failed; he

reached the house without knowing what he should do if he did find her

there.

It was after office hours, and the street door was closed; the woman who

opened it could not say whether Mr. Bosinney were in or no; she had not

seen him that day, not for two or three days; she did not attend to him

now, nobody attended to him, he....

Soames interrupted her, he would go up and see for himself. He went up

with a dogged, white face.

The top floor was unlighted, the door closed, no one answered his

ringing, he could hear no sound. He was obliged to descend, shivering

under his fur, a chill at his heart. Hailing a cab, he told the man to

drive to Park Lane.

On the way he tried to recollect when he had last given her a cheque;

she could not have more than three or four pounds, but there were her

jewels; and with exquisite torture he remembered how much money she

could raise on these; enough to take them abroad; enough for them to

live on for months! He tried to calculate; the cab stopped, and he got

out with the calculation unmade.

The butler asked whether Mrs. Soames was in the cab, the master had told

him they were both expected to dinner.

Soames answered: "No. Mrs. Forsyte has a cold."

The butler was sorry.

Soames thought he was looking at him inquisitively, and remembering that

he was not in dress clothes, asked: "Anybody here to dinner, Warmson?"

"Nobody but Mr. and Mrs. Dartie, sir."

Again it seemed to Soames that the butler was looking curiously at him.

His composure gave way.

"What are you looking at?" he said. "What's the matter with me, eh?"

The butler blushed, hung up the fur coat, murmured something that

sounded like: "Nothing, sir, I'm sure, sir," and stealthily withdrew.

Soames walked upstairs. Passing the drawing-room without a look, he went

straight up to his mother's and father's bedroom.

James, standing sideways, the concave lines of his tall, lean figure

displayed to advantage in shirt-sleeves and evening waistcoat, his head

bent, the end of his white tie peeping askew from underneath one white

Dundreary whisker, his eyes peering with intense concentration, his lips

pouting, was hooking the top hooks of his wife's bodice. Soames stopped;

he felt half-choked, whether because he had come upstairs too fast, or

for some other reason. He--he himself had never--never been asked to....

He heard his father's voice, as though there were a pin in his mouth,

saying: "Who's that? Who's there? What d'you want?" His mother's: "Here,

Felice, come and hook this; your master'll never get done."

He put his hand up to his throat, and said hoarsely:

"It's I--Soames!"

He noticed gratefully the affectionate surprise in Emily's: "Well, my

dear boy?" and James', as he dropped the hook: "What, Soames! What's

brought you up? Aren't you well?"

He answered mechanically: "I'm all right," and looked at them, and it

seemed impossible to bring out his news.

James, quick to take alarm, began: "You don't look well. I expect you've

taken a chill--it's liver, I shouldn't wonder. Your mother'll give

you...."

But Emily broke in quietly: "Have you brought Irene?"

Soames shook his head.

"No," he stammered, "she--she's left me!"

Emily deserted the mirror before which she was standing. Her tall, full

figure lost its majesty and became very human as she came running over

to Soames.

"My dear boy! My dear boy!"

She put her lips to his forehead, and stroked his hand.

James, too, had turned full towards his son; his face looked older.

"Left you?" he said. "What d'you mean--left you? You never told me she

was going to leave you."

Soames answered surlily: "How could I tell? What's to be done?"

James began walking up and down; he looked strange and stork-like

without a coat. "What's to be done!" he muttered. "How should I know

what's to be done? What's the good of asking me? Nobody tells me

anything, and then they come and ask me what's to be done; and I should

like to know how I'm to tell them! Here's your mother, there she stands;

she doesn't say anything. What I should say you've got to do is to

follow her.."

Soames smiled; his peculiar, supercilious smile had never before looked

pitiable.

"I don't know where she's gone," he said.

"Don't know where she's gone!" said James. "How d'you mean, don't know

where she's gone? Where d'you suppose she's gone? She's gone after that

young Bosinney, that's where she's gone. I knew how it would be."

Soames, in the long silence that followed, felt his mother pressing

his hand. And all that passed seemed to pass as though his own power of

thinking or doing had gone to sleep.

His father's face, dusky red, twitching as if he were going to cry, and

words breaking out that seemed rent from him by some spasm in his soul.

"There'll be a scandal; I always said so." Then, no one saying anything:

"And there you stand, you and your mother!"

And Emily's voice, calm, rather contemptuous: "Come, now, James! Soames

will do all that he can."

And James, staring at the floor, a little brokenly: "Well, I can't help

you; I'm getting old. Don't you be in too great a hurry, my boy."

And his mother's voice again: "Soames will do all he can to get her

back. We won't talk of it. It'll all come right, I dare say."

And James: "Well, I can't see how it can come right. And if she hasn't

gone off with that young Bosinney, my advice to you is not to listen to

her, but to follow her and get her back."

Once more Soames felt his mother stroking his hand, in token of her

approval, and as though repeating some form of sacred oath, he muttered

between his teeth: "I will!"

All three went down to the drawing-room together. There, were gathered

the three girls and Dartie; had Irene been present, the family circle

would have been complete.

James sank into his armchair, and except for a word of cold greeting to

Dartie, whom he both despised and dreaded, as a man likely to be always

in want of money, he said nothing till dinner was announced. Soames,

too, was silent; Emily alone, a woman of cool courage, maintained a

conversation with Winifred on trivial subjects. She was never more

composed in her manner and conversation than that evening.

A decision having been come to not to speak of Irene's flight, no view

was expressed by any other member of the family as to the right course

to be pursued; there can be little doubt, from the general tone adopted

in relation to events as they afterwards turned out, that James's

advice: "Don't you listen to her, follow her and get her back!" would,

with here and there an exception, have been regarded as sound, not only

in Park Lane, but amongst the Nicholases, the Rogers, and at Timothy's.

Just as it would surely have been endorsed by that wider body of

Forsytes all over London, who were merely excluded from judgment by

ignorance of the story.

In spite then of Emily's efforts, the dinner was served by Warmson and

the footman almost in silence. Dartie was sulky, and drank all he could

get; the girls seldom talked to each other at any time. James asked once

where June was, and what she was doing with herself in these days.

No one could tell him. He sank back into gloom. Only when Winifred

recounted how little Publius had given his bad penny to a beggar, did he

brighten up.

"Ah!" he said, "that's a clever little chap. I don't know what'll become

of him, if he goes on like this. An intelligent little chap, I call

him!" But it was only a flash.

The courses succeeded one another solemnly, under the electric light,

which glared down onto the table, but barely reached the principal

ornament of the walls, a so-called 'Sea Piece by Turner,' almost

entirely composed of cordage and drowning men.

Champagne was handed, and then a bottle of James' prehistoric port, but

as by the chill hand of some skeleton.

At ten o'clock Soames left; twice in reply to questions, he had said

that Irene was not well; he felt he could no longer trust himself. His

mother kissed him with her large soft kiss, and he pressed her hand, a

flush of warmth in his cheeks. He walked away in the cold wind, which

whistled desolately round the corners of the streets, under a sky of

clear steel-blue, alive with stars; he noticed neither their frosty

greeting, nor the crackle of the curled-up plane-leaves, nor the

night-women hurrying in their shabby furs, nor the pinched faces of

vagabonds at street corners. Winter was come! But Soames hastened home,

oblivious; his hands trembled as he took the late letters from the gilt

wire cage into which they had been thrust through the slit in the door.'

None from Irene!

He went into the dining-room; the fire was bright there, his chair drawn

up to it, slippers ready, spirit case, and carven cigarette box on the

table; but after staring at it all for a minute or two, he turned out

the light and went upstairs. There was a fire too in his dressing-room,

but her room was dark and cold. It was into this room that Soames went.

He made a great illumination with candles, and for a long time continued

pacing up and down between the bed and the door. He could not get

used to the thought that she had really left him, and as though still

searching for some message, some reason, some reading of all the mystery

of his married life, he began opening every recess and drawer.

There were her dresses; he had always liked, indeed insisted, that she

should be well-dressed--she had taken very few; two or three at most,

and drawer after drawer; full of linen and silk things, was untouched.

Perhaps after all it was only a freak, and she had gone to the seaside

for a few days' change. If only that were so, and she were really coming

back, he would never again do as he had done that fatal night before

last, never again run that risk--though it was her duty, her duty as a

wife; though she did belong to him--he would never again run that risk;

she was evidently not quite right in her head!

He stooped over the drawer where she kept her jewels; it was not locked,

and came open as he pulled; the jewel box had the key in it. This

surprised him until he remembered that it was sure to be empty. He

opened it.

It was far from empty. Divided, in little green velvet compartments,

were all the things he had given her, even her watch, and stuck into

the recess that contained the watch was a three-cornered note addressed

'Soames Forsyte,' in Irene's handwriting:

'I think I have taken nothing that you or your people have given me.'

And that was all.

He looked at the clasps and bracelets of diamonds and pearls, at the

little flat gold watch with a great diamond set in sapphires, at the

chains and rings, each in its nest, and the tears rushed up in his eyes

and dropped upon them.

Nothing that she could have done, nothing that she had done, brought

home to him like this the inner significance of her act. For the moment,

perhaps, he understood nearly all there was to understand--understood

that she loathed him, that she had loathed him for years, that for all

intents and purposes they were like people living in different worlds,

that there was no hope for him, never had been; even, that she had

suffered--that she was to be pitied.

In that moment of emotion he betrayed the Forsyte in him--forgot

himself, his interests, his property--was capable of almost anything;

was lifted into the pure ether of the selfless and unpractical.

Such moments pass quickly.

And as though with the tears he had purged himself of weakness, he got

up, locked the box, and slowly, almost trembling, carried it with him

into the other room.

CHAPTER VII--JUNE'S VICTORY

June had waited for her chance, scanning the duller columns of the

journals, morning and evening with an assiduity which at first

puzzled old Jolyon; and when her chance came, she took it with all the

promptitude and resolute tenacity of her character.

She will always remember best in her life that morning when at last she

saw amongst the reliable Cause List of the Times newspaper, under the

heading of Court XIII, Mr. Justice Bentham, the case of Forsyte v.

Bosinney.

Like a gambler who stakes his last piece of money, she had prepared to

hazard her all upon this throw; it was not her nature to contemplate

defeat. How, unless with the instinct of a woman in love, she knew that

Bosinney's discomfiture in this action was assured, cannot be told--on

this assumption, however, she laid her plans, as upon a certainty.

Half past eleven found her at watch in the gallery of Court XIII.,

and there she remained till the case of Forsyte v. Bosinney was over.

Bosinney's absence did not disquiet her; she had felt instinctively that

he would not defend himself. At the end of the judgment she hastened

down, and took a cab to his rooms.

She passed the open street-door and the offices on the three lower

floors without attracting notice; not till she reached the top did her

difficulties begin.

Her ring was not answered; she had now to make up her mind whether she

would go down and ask the caretaker in the basement to let her in to

await Mr. Bosinney's return, or remain patiently outside the door,

trusting that no one would come up. She decided on the latter course.

A quarter of an hour had passed in freezing vigil on the landing, before

it occurred to her that Bosinney had been used to leave the key of

his rooms under the door-mat. She looked and found it there. For some

minutes she could not decide to make use of it; at last she let herself

in and left the door open that anyone who came might see she was there

on business.

This was not the same June who had paid the trembling visit five

months ago; those months of suffering and restraint had made her less

sensitive; she had dwelt on this visit so long, with such minuteness,

that its terrors were discounted beforehand. She was not there to fail

this time, for if she failed no one could help her.

Like some mother beast on the watch over her young, her little quick

figure never stood still in that room, but wandered from wall to wall,

from window to door, fingering now one thing, now another. There was

dust everywhere, the room could not have been cleaned for weeks, and

June, quick to catch at anything that should buoy up her hope, saw in

it a sign that he had been obliged, for economy's sake, to give up his

servant.

She looked into the bedroom; the bed was roughly made, as though by

the hand of man. Listening intently, she darted in, and peered into his

cupboards. A few shirts and collars, a pair of muddy boots--the room was

bare even of garments.

She stole back to the sitting-room, and now she noticed the absence of

all the little things he had set store by. The clock that had been his

mother's, the field-glasses that had hung over the sofa; two really

valuable old prints of Harrow, where his father had been at school, and

last, not least, the piece of Japanese pottery she herself had

given him. All were gone; and in spite of the rage roused within her

championing soul at the thought that the world should treat him thus,

their disappearance augured happily for the success of her plan.

It was while looking at the spot where the piece of Japanese pottery had

stood that she felt a strange certainty of being watched, and, turning,

saw Irene in the open doorway.

The two stood gazing at each other for a minute in silence; then June

walked forward and held out her hand. Irene did not take it.

When her hand was refused, June put it behind her. Her eyes grew steady

with anger; she waited for Irene to speak; and thus waiting, took in,

with who-knows-what rage of jealousy, suspicion, and curiosity, every

detail of her friend's face and dress and figure.

Irene was clothed in her long grey fur; the travelling cap on her head

left a wave of gold hair visible above her forehead. The soft fullness

of the coat made her face as small as a child's.

Unlike June's cheeks, her cheeks had no colour in them, but were ivory

white and pinched as if with cold. Dark circles lay round her eyes. In

one hand she held a bunch of violets.

She looked back at June, no smile on her lips; and with those great

dark eyes fastened on her, the girl, for all her startled anger, felt

something of the old spell.

She spoke first, after all.

"What have you come for?" But the feeling that she herself was being

asked the same question, made her add: "This horrible case. I came to

tell him--he has lost it."

Irene did not speak, her eyes never moved from June's face, and the girl

cried:

"Don't stand there as if you were made of stone!"

Irene laughed: "I wish to God I were!"

But June turned away: "Stop!" she cried, "don't tell me! I don't want to

hear! I don't want to hear what you've come for. I don't want to hear!"

And like some uneasy spirit, she began swiftly walking to and fro.

Suddenly she broke out:

"I was here first. We can't both stay here together!"

On Irene's face a smile wandered up, and died out like a flicker of

firelight. She did not move. And then it was that June perceived under

the softness and immobility of this figure something desperate and

resolved; something not to be turned away, something dangerous. She

tore off her hat, and, putting both hands to her brow, pressed back the

bronze mass of her hair.

"You have no right here!" she cried defiantly.

Irene answered: "I have no right anywhere!

"What do you mean?"

"I have left Soames. You always wanted me to!"

June put her hands over her ears.

"Don't! I don't want to hear anything--I don't want to know anything.

It's impossible to fight with you! What makes you stand like that? Why

don't you go?"

Irene's lips moved; she seemed to be saying: "Where should I go?"

June turned to the window. She could see the face of a clock down in the

street. It was nearly four. At any moment he might come! She looked back

across her shoulder, and her face was distorted with anger.

But Irene had not moved; in her gloved hands she ceaselessly turned and

twisted the little bunch of violets.

The tears of rage and disappointment rolled down June's cheeks.

"How could you come?" she said. "You have been a false friend to me!"

Again Irene laughed. June saw that she had played a wrong card, and

broke down.

"Why have you come?" she sobbed. "You've ruined my life, and now you

want to ruin his!"

Irene's mouth quivered; her eyes met June's with a look so mournful that

the girl cried out in the midst of her sobbing, "No, no!"

But Irene's head bent till it touched her breast. She turned, and went

quickly out, hiding her lips with the little bunch of violets.

June ran to the door. She heard the footsteps going down and down. She

called out: "Come back, Irene! Come back!"

The footsteps died away....

Bewildered and torn, the girl stood at the top of the stairs. Why had

Irene gone, leaving her mistress of the field? What did it mean? Had

she really given him up to her? Or had she...? And she was the prey of a

gnawing uncertainty.... Bosinney did not come....

About six o'clock that afternoon old Jolyon returned from Wistaria

Avenue, where now almost every day he spent some hours, and asked if his

grand-daughter were upstairs. On being told that she had just come in,

he sent up to her room to request her to come down and speak to him.

He had made up his mind to tell her that he was reconciled with her

father. In future bygones must be bygones. He would no longer live

alone, or practically alone, in this great house; he was going to give

it up, and take one in the country for his son, where they could all

go and live together. If June did not like this, she could have an

allowance and live by herself. It wouldn't make much difference to her,

for it was a long time since she had shown him any affection.

But when June came down, her face was pinched and piteous; there was a

strained, pathetic look in her eyes. She snuggled up in her old attitude

on the arm of his chair, and what he said compared but poorly with the

clear, authoritative, injured statement he had thought out with much

care. His heart felt sore, as the great heart of a mother-bird feels

sore when its youngling flies and bruises its wing. His words halted, as

though he were apologizing for having at last deviated from the path of

virtue, and succumbed, in defiance of sounder principles, to his more

natural instincts.

He seemed nervous lest, in thus announcing his intentions, he should

be setting his granddaughter a bad example; and now that he came to the

point, his way of putting the suggestion that, if she didn't like it,

she could live by herself and lump it, was delicate in the extreme.'

"And if, by any chance, my darling," he said, "you found you didn't get

on--with them, why, I could make that all right. You could have what you

liked. We could find a little flat in London where you could set up,

and I could be running to continually. But the children," he added, "are

dear little things!"

Then, in the midst of this grave, rather transparent, explanation of

changed policy, his eyes twinkled. "This'll astonish Timothy's weak

nerves. That precious young thing will have something to say about this,

or I'm a Dutchman!"

June had not yet spoken. Perched thus on the arm of his chair, with her

head above him, her face was invisible. But presently he felt her warm

cheek against his own, and knew that, at all events, there was nothing

very alarming in her attitude towards his news. He began to take

courage.

"You'll like your father," he said--"an amiable chap. Never was much

push about him, but easy to get on with. You'll find him artistic and

all that."

And old Jolyon bethought him of the dozen or so water-colour drawings

all carefully locked up in his bedroom; for now that his son was going

to become a man of property he did not think them quite such poor things

as heretofore.

"As to your--your stepmother," he said, using the word with some little

difficulty, "I call her a refined woman--a bit of a Mrs. Gummidge,

I shouldn't wonder--but very fond of Jo. And the children," he

repeated--indeed, this sentence ran like music through all his solemn

self-justification--"are sweet little things!"

If June had known, those words but reincarnated that tender love for

little children, for the young and weak, which in the past had made

him desert his son for her tiny self, and now, as the cycle rolled, was

taking him from her.

But he began to get alarmed at her silence, and asked impatiently:

"Well, what do you say?"

June slid down to his knee, and she in her turn began her tale. She

thought it would all go splendidly; she did not see any difficulty, and

she did not care a bit what people thought.

Old Jolyon wriggled. H'm! then people would think! He had thought that

after all these years perhaps they wouldn't! Well, he couldn't help it!

Nevertheless, he could not approve of his granddaughter's way of putting

it--she ought to mind what people thought!

Yet he said nothing. His feelings were too mixed, too inconsistent for

expression.

No--went on June--he did not care; what business was it of theirs? There

was only one thing--and with her cheek pressing against his knee, old

Jolyon knew at once that this something was no trifle: As he was going

to buy a house in the country, would he not--to please her--buy that

splendid house of Soames' at Robin Hill? It was finished, it was

perfectly beautiful, and no one would live in it now. They would all be

so happy there.

Old Jolyon was on the alert at once. Wasn't the 'man of property' going

to live in his new house, then? He never alluded to Soames now but under

this title.

"No"--June said--"he was not; she knew that he was not!"

How did she know?

She could not tell him, but she knew. She knew nearly for certain! It

was most unlikely; circumstances had changed! Irene's words still rang

in her head: "I have left Soames. Where should I go?"

But she kept silence about that.

If her grandfather would only buy it and settle that wretched claim that

ought never to have been made on Phil! It would be the very best thing

for everybody, and everything--everything might come straight.

And June put her lips to his forehead, and pressed them close.

But old Jolyon freed himself from her caress, his face wore the judicial

look which came upon it when he dealt with affairs. He asked: What

did she mean? There was something behind all this--had she been seeing

Bosinney?

June answered: "No; but I have been to his rooms."

"Been to his rooms? Who took you there?"

June faced him steadily. "I went alone. He has lost that case. I don't

care whether it was right or wrong. I want to help him; and I will!"

Old Jolyon asked again: "Have you seen him?" His glance seemed to pierce

right through the girl's eyes into her soul.

Again June answered: "No; he was not there. I waited, but he did not

come."

Old Jolyon made a movement of relief. She had risen and looked down at

him; so slight, and light, and young, but so fixed, and so determined;

and disturbed, vexed, as he was, he could not frown away that fixed

look. The feeling of being beaten, of the reins having slipped, of being

old and tired, mastered him.

"Ah!" he said at last, "you'll get yourself into a mess one of these

days, I can see. You want your own way in everything."

Visited by one of his strange bursts of philosophy, he added: "Like that

you were born; and like that you'll stay until you die!"

And he, who in his dealings with men of business, with Boards, with

Forsytes of all descriptions, with such as were not Forsytes, had always

had his own way, looked at his indomitable grandchild sadly--for he felt

in her that quality which above all others he unconsciously admired.

"Do you know what they say is going on?" he said slowly.

June crimsoned.

"Yes--no! I know--and I don't know--I don't care!" and she stamped her

foot.

"I believe," said old Jolyon, dropping his eyes, "that you'd have him if

he were dead!"

There was a long silence before he spoke again.

"But as to buying this house--you don't know what you're talking about!"

June said that she did. She knew that he could get it if he wanted. He

would only have to give what it cost.

"What it cost! You know nothing about it. I won't go to Soames--I'll

have nothing more to do with that young man."

"But you needn't; you can go to Uncle James. If you can't buy the house,

will you pay his lawsuit claim? I know he is terribly hard up--I've seen

it. You can stop it out of my money!"

A twinkle came into old Jolyon's eyes.

"Stop it out of your money! A pretty way. And what will you do, pray,

without your money?"

But secretly, the idea of wresting the house from James and his son had

begun to take hold of him. He had heard on Forsyte 'Change much comment,

much rather doubtful praise of this house. It was 'too artistic,' but a

fine place. To take from the 'man of property' that on which he had set

his heart, would be a crowning triumph over James, practical proof that

he was going to make a man of property of Jo, to put him back in his

proper position, and there to keep him secure. Justice once for all on

those who had chosen to regard his son as a poor, penniless outcast.

He would see, he would see! It might be out of the question; he was not

going to pay a fancy price, but if it could be done, why, perhaps he

would do it!

And still more secretly he knew that he could not refuse her.

But he did not commit himself. He would think it over--he said to June.

CHAPTER VIII--BOSINNEY'S DEPARTURE

Old Jolyon was not given to hasty decisions; it is probable that he

would have continued to think over the purchase of the house at Robin

Hill, had not June's face told him that he would have no peace until he

acted.

At breakfast next morning she asked him what time she should order the

carriage.

"Carriage!" he said, with some appearance of innocence; "what for? I'm

not going out!"

She answered: "If you don't go early, you won't catch Uncle James before

he goes into the City."

"James! what about your Uncle James?"

"The house," she replied, in such a voice that he no longer pretended

ignorance.

"I've not made up my mind," he said.

"You must! You must! Oh! Gran--think of me!"

Old Jolyon grumbled out: "Think of you--I'm always thinking of you,

but you don't think of yourself; you don't think what you're letting

yourself in for. Well, order the carriage at ten!"

At a quarter past he was placing his umbrella in the stand at Park

Lane--he did not choose to relinquish his hat and coat; telling Warmson

that he wanted to see his master, he went, without being announced, into

the study, and sat down.

James was still in the dining-room talking to Soames, who had come round

again before breakfast. On hearing who his visitor was, he muttered

nervously: "Now, what's he want, I wonder?"

He then got up.

"Well," he said to Soames, "don't you go doing anything in a hurry. The

first thing is to find out where she is--I should go to Stainer's about

it; they're the best men, if they can't find her, nobody can." And

suddenly moved to strange softness, he muttered to himself, "Poor little

thing, I can't tell what she was thinking about!" and went out blowing

his nose.

Old Jolyon did not rise on seeing his brother, but held out his hand,

and exchanged with him the clasp of a Forsyte.

James took another chair by the table, and leaned his head on his hand.

"Well," he said, "how are you? We don't see much of you nowadays!"

Old Jolyon paid no attention to the remark.

"How's Emily?" he asked; and waiting for no reply, went on "I've come to

see you about this affair of young Bosinney's. I'm told that new house

of his is a white elephant."

"I don't know anything about a white elephant," said James, "I know he's

lost his case, and I should say he'll go bankrupt."

Old Jolyon was not slow to seize the opportunity this gave him.

"I shouldn't wonder a bit!" he agreed; "and if he goes bankrupt, the

'man of property'--that is, Soames'll be out of pocket. Now, what I was

thinking was this: If he's not going to live there...."

Seeing both surprise and suspicion in James' eye, he quickly went on: "I

don't want to know anything; I suppose Irene's put her foot down--it's

not material to me. But I'm thinking of a house in the country myself,

not too far from London, and if it suited me I don't say that I mightn't

look at it, at a price."

James listened to this statement with a strange mixture of doubt,

suspicion, and relief, merging into a dread of something behind, and

tinged with the remains of his old undoubted reliance upon his elder

brother's good faith and judgment. There was anxiety, too, as to what

old Jolyon could have heard and how he had heard it; and a sort of

hopefulness arising from the thought that if June's connection with

Bosinney were completely at an end, her grandfather would hardly seem

anxious to help the young fellow. Altogether he was puzzled; as he did

not like either to show this, or to commit himself in any way, he said:

"They tell me you're altering your Will in favour of your son."

He had not been told this; he had merely added the fact of having seen

old Jolyon with his son and grandchildren to the fact that he had taken

his Will away from Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte. The shot went home.

"Who told you that?" asked old Jolyon.

"I'm sure I don't know," said James; "I can't remember names--I know

somebody told me Soames spent a lot of money on this house; he's not

likely to part with it except at a good price."

"Well," said old Jolyon, "if, he thinks I'm going to pay a fancy price,

he's mistaken. I've not got the money to throw away that he seems to

have. Let him try and sell it at a forced sale, and see what he'll get.

It's not every man's house, I hear!"

James, who was secretly also of this opinion, answered: "It's a

gentleman's house. Soames is here now if you'd like to see him."

"No," said old Jolyon, "I haven't got as far as that; and I'm not likely

to, I can see that very well if I'm met in this manner!"

James was a little cowed; when it came to the actual figures of a

commercial transaction he was sure of himself, for then he was dealing

with facts, not with men; but preliminary negotiations such as these

made him nervous--he never knew quite how far he could go.

"Well," he said, "I know nothing about it. Soames, he tells me nothing;

I should think he'd entertain it--it's a question of price."

"Oh!" said old Jolyon, "don't let him make a favour of it!" He placed

his hat on his head in dudgeon.

The door was opened and Soames came in.

"There's a policeman out here," he said with his half smile, "for Uncle

Jolyon."

Old Jolyon looked at him angrily, and James said: "A policeman? I don't

know anything about a policeman. But I suppose you know something about

him," he added to old Jolyon with a look of suspicion: "I suppose you'd

better see him!"

In the hall an Inspector of Police stood stolidly regarding with

heavy-lidded pale-blue eyes the fine old English furniture picked up by

James at the famous Mavrojano sale in Portman Square. "You'll find my

brother in there," said James.

The Inspector raised his fingers respectfully to his peaked cap, and

entered the study.

James saw him go in with a strange sensation.

"Well," he said to Soames, "I suppose we must wait and see what he

wants. Your uncle's been here about the house!"

He returned with Soames into the dining-room, but could not rest.

"Now what does he want?" he murmured again.

"Who?" replied Soames: "the Inspector? They sent him round from Stanhope

Gate, that's all I know. That 'nonconformist' of Uncle Jolyon's has been

pilfering, I shouldn't wonder!"

But in spite of his calmness, he too was ill at ease.

At the end of ten minutes old Jolyon came in. He walked up to the table,

and stood there perfectly silent pulling at his long white moustaches.

James gazed up at him with opening mouth; he had never seen his brother

look like this.

Old Jolyon raised his hand, and said slowly:

"Young Bosinney has been run over in the fog and killed."

Then standing above his brother and his nephew, and looking down at him

with his deep eyes:

"There's--some--talk--of--suicide," he said.

James' jaw dropped. "Suicide! What should he do that for?"

Old Jolyon answered sternly: "God knows, if you and your son don't!"

But James did not reply.

For all men of great age, even for all Forsytes, life has had bitter

experiences. The passer-by, who sees them wrapped in cloaks of custom,

wealth, and comfort, would never suspect that such black shadows had

fallen on their roads. To every man of great age--to Sir Walter Bentham

himself--the idea of suicide has once at least been present in the

ante-room of his soul; on the threshold, waiting to enter, held out from

the inmost chamber by some chance reality, some vague fear, some painful

hope. To Forsytes that final renunciation of property is hard. Oh! it

is hard! Seldom--perhaps never--can they achieve, it; and yet, how near

have they not sometimes been!

So even with James! Then in the medley of his thoughts, he broke out:

"Why I saw it in the paper yesterday: 'Run over in the fog!' They didn't

know his name!" He turned from one face to the other in his confusion

of soul; but instinctively all the time he was rejecting that rumour of

suicide. He dared not entertain this thought, so against his interest,

against the interest of his son, of every Forsyte. He strove against it;

and as his nature ever unconsciously rejected that which it could

not with safety accept, so gradually he overcame this fear. It was an

accident! It must have been!

Old Jolyon broke in on his reverie.

"Death was instantaneous. He lay all day yesterday at the hospital.

There was nothing to tell them who he was. I am going there now; you and

your son had better come too."

No one opposing this command he led the way from the room.

The day was still and clear and bright, and driving over to Park Lane

from Stanhope Gate, old Jolyon had had the carriage open. Sitting

back on the padded cushions, finishing his cigar, he had noticed with

pleasure the keen crispness of the air, the bustle of the cabs and

people; the strange, almost Parisian, alacrity that the first fine day

will bring into London streets after a spell of fog or rain. And he had

felt so happy; he had not felt like it for months. His confession to

June was off his mind; he had the prospect of his son's, above all, of

his grandchildren's company in the future--(he had appointed to meet

young Jolyon at the Hotch Potch that very manning to--discuss it again);

and there was the pleasurable excitement of a coming encounter, a coming

victory, over James and the 'man of property' in the matter of the

house.

He had the carriage closed now; he had no heart to look on gaiety; nor

was it right that Forsytes should be seen driving with an Inspector of

Police.

In that carriage the Inspector spoke again of the death:

"It was not so very thick--Just there. The driver says the gentleman

must have had time to see what he was about, he seemed to walk right

into it. It appears that he was very hard up, we found several pawn

tickets at his rooms, his account at the bank is overdrawn, and there's

this case in to-day's papers;" his cold blue eyes travelled from one to

another of the three Forsytes in the carriage.

Old Jolyon watching from his corner saw his brother's face change, and

the brooding, worried, look deepen on it. At the Inspector's words,

indeed, all James' doubts and fears revived. Hard-up--pawn-tickets--an

overdrawn account! These words that had all his life been a far-off

nightmare to him, seemed to make uncannily real that suspicion of

suicide which must on no account be entertained. He sought his son's

eye; but lynx-eyed, taciturn, immovable, Soames gave no answering

look. And to old Jolyon watching, divining the league of mutual defence

between them, there came an overmastering desire to have his own son at

his side, as though this visit to the dead man's body was a battle in

which otherwise he must single-handed meet those two. And the thought of

how to keep June's name out of the business kept whirring in his brain.

James had his son to support him! Why should he not send for Jo?

Taking out his card-case, he pencilled the following message:

'Come round at once. I've sent the carriage for you.'

On getting out he gave this card to his coachman, telling him to

drive--as fast as possible to the Hotch Potch Club, and if Mr. Jolyon

Forsyte were there to give him the card and bring him at once. If not

there yet, he was to wait till he came.

He followed the others slowly up the steps, leaning on his umbrella,

and stood a moment to get his breath. The Inspector said: "This is the

mortuary, sir. But take your time."

In the bare, white-walled room, empty of all but a streak of sunshine

smeared along the dustless floor, lay a form covered by a sheet. With

a huge steady hand the Inspector took the hem and turned it back. A

sightless face gazed up at them, and on either side of that sightless

defiant face the three Forsytes gazed down; in each one of them the

secret emotions, fears, and pity of his own nature rose and fell like

the rising, falling waves of life, whose wash those white walls barred

out now for ever from Bosinney. And in each one of them the trend of his

nature, the odd essential spring, which moved him in fashions minutely,

unalterably different from those of every other human being, forced him

to a different attitude of thought. Far from the others, yet inscrutably

close, each stood thus, alone with death, silent, his eyes lowered.

The Inspector asked softly:

"You identify the gentleman, sir?"

Old Jolyon raised his head and nodded. He looked at his brother

opposite, at that long lean figure brooding over the dead man, with face

dusky red, and strained grey eyes; and at the figure of Soames white and

still by his father's side. And all that he had felt against those two

was gone like smoke in the long white presence of Death. Whence comes

it, how comes it--Death? Sudden reverse of all that goes before; blind

setting forth on a path that leads to where? Dark quenching of the fire!

The heavy, brutal crushing--out that all men must go through, keeping

their eyes clear and brave unto the end! Small and of no import, insects

though they are! And across old Jolyon's face there flitted a gleam, for

Soames, murmuring to the Inspector, crept noiselessly away.

Then suddenly James raised his eyes. There was a queer appeal in that

suspicious troubled look: "I know I'm no match for you," it seemed to

say. And, hunting for handkerchief he wiped his brow; then, bending

sorrowful and lank over the dead man, he too turned and hurried out.

Old Jolyon stood, still as death, his eyes fixed on the body. Who shall

tell of what he was thinking? Of himself, when his hair was brown like

the hair of that young fellow dead before him? Of himself, with his

battle just beginning, the long, long battle he had loved; the battle

that was over for this young man almost before it had begun? Of his

grand-daughter, with her broken hopes? Of that other woman? Of the

strangeness, and the pity of it? And the irony, inscrutable, and bitter

of that end? Justice! There was no justice for men, for they were ever

in the dark!

Or perhaps in his philosophy he thought: Better to be out of, it all!

Better to have done with it, like this poor youth....

Some one touched him on the arm.

A tear started up and wetted his eyelash. "Well," he said, "I'm no good

here. I'd better be going. You'll come to me as soon as you can, Jo,"

and with his head bowed he went away.

It was young Jolyon's turn to take his stand beside the dead man, round

whose fallen body he seemed to see all the Forsytes breathless, and

prostrated. The stroke had fallen too swiftly.

The forces underlying every tragedy--forces that take no denial, working

through cross currents to their ironical end, had met and fused with

a thunder-clap, flung out the victim, and flattened to the ground all

those that stood around.

Or so at all events young Jolyon seemed to see them, lying around

Bosinney's body.

He asked the Inspector to tell him what had happened, and the latter,

like a man who does not every day get such a chance, again detailed such

facts as were known.

"There's more here, sir, however," he said, "than meets the eye. I don't

believe in suicide, nor in pure accident, myself. It's more likely I

think that he was suffering under great stress of mind, and took no

notice of things about him. Perhaps you can throw some light on these."

He took from his pocket a little packet and laid it on the table.

Carefully undoing it, he revealed a lady's handkerchief, pinned through

the folds with a pin of discoloured Venetian gold, the stone of which

had fallen from the socket. A scent of dried violets rose to young

Jolyon's nostrils.

"Found in his breast pocket," said the Inspector; "the name has been cut

away!"

Young Jolyon with difficulty answered: "I'm afraid I cannot help you!"

But vividly there rose before him the face he had seen light up, so

tremulous and glad, at Bosinney's coming! Of her he thought more than

of his own daughter, more than of them all--of her with the dark, soft

glance, the delicate passive face, waiting for the dead man, waiting

even at that moment, perhaps, still and patient in the sunlight.

He walked sorrowfully away from the hospital towards his father's house,

reflecting that this death would break up the Forsyte family. The stroke

had indeed slipped past their defences into the very wood of their tree.

They might flourish to all appearance as before, preserving a brave show

before the eyes of London, but the trunk was dead, withered by the same

flash that had stricken down Bosinney. And now the saplings would take

its place, each one a new custodian of the sense of property.

Good forest of Forsytes! thought young Jolyon--soundest timber of our

land!

Concerning the cause of this death--his family would doubtless reject

with vigour the suspicion of suicide, which was so compromising! They

would take it as an accident, a stroke of fate. In their hearts they

would even feel it an intervention of Providence, a retribution--had not

Bosinney endangered their two most priceless possessions, the pocket and

the hearth? And they would talk of 'that unfortunate accident of young

Bosinney's,' but perhaps they would not talk--silence might be better!

As for himself, he regarded the bus-driver's account of the accident as

of very little value. For no one so madly in love committed suicide for

want of money; nor was Bosinney the sort of fellow to set much store by

a financial crisis. And so he too, rejected this theory of suicide, the

dead man's face rose too clearly before him. Gone in the heyday of his

summer--and to believe thus that an accident had cut Bosinney off in the

full sweep of his passion was more than ever pitiful to young Jolyon.

Then came a vision of Soames' home as it now was, and must be hereafter.

The streak of lightning had flashed its clear uncanny gleam on bare

bones with grinning spaces between, the disguising flesh was gone....

In the dining-room at Stanhope Gate old Jolyon was sitting alone when

his son came in. He looked very wan in his great armchair. And his eyes

travelling round the walls with their pictures of still life, and the

masterpiece 'Dutch fishing-boats at Sunset' seemed as though passing

their gaze over his life with its hopes, its gains, its achievements.

"Ah! Jo!" he said, "is that you? I've told poor little June. But that's

not all of it. Are you going to Soames'? She's brought it on herself,

I suppose; but somehow I can't bear to think of her, shut up there--and

all alone." And holding up his thin, veined hand, he clenched it.

CHAPTER IX--IRENE'S RETURN

After leaving James and old Jolyon in the mortuary of the hospital,

Soames hurried aimlessly along the streets.

The tragic event of Bosinney's death altered the complexion of

everything. There was no longer the same feeling that to lose a minute

would be fatal, nor would he now risk communicating the fact of his

wife's flight to anyone till the inquest was over.

That morning he had risen early, before the postman came, had taken the

first-post letters from the box himself, and, though there had been

none from Irene, he had made an opportunity of telling Bilson that

her mistress was at the sea; he would probably, he said, be going down

himself from Saturday to Monday. This had given him time to breathe,

time to leave no stone unturned to find her.

But now, cut off from taking steps by Bosinney's death--that strange

death, to think of which was like putting a hot iron to his heart, like

lifting a great weight from it--he did not know how to pass his day; and

he wandered here and there through the streets, looking at every face he

met, devoured by a hundred anxieties.

And as he wandered, he thought of him who had finished his wandering,

his prowling, and would never haunt his house again.

Already in the afternoon he passed posters announcing the identity of

the dead man, and bought the papers to see what they said. He would stop

their mouths if he could, and he went into the City, and was closeted

with Boulter for a long time.

On his way home, passing the steps of Jobson's about half past four, he

met George Forsyte, who held out an evening paper to Soames, saying:

"Here! Have you seen this about the poor Buccaneer?"

Soames answered stonily: "Yes."

George stared at him. He had never liked Soames; he now held him

responsible for Bosinney's death. Soames had done for him--done for him

by that act of property that had sent the Buccaneer to run amok that

fatal afternoon.

'The poor fellow,' he was thinking, 'was so cracked with jealousy, so

cracked for his vengeance, that he heard nothing of the omnibus in that

infernal fog.'

Soames had done for him! And this judgment was in George's eyes.

"They talk of suicide here," he said at last. "That cat won't jump."

Soames shook his head. "An accident," he muttered.

Clenching his fist on the paper, George crammed it into his pocket. He

could not resist a parting shot.

"H'mm! All flourishing at home? Any little Soameses yet?"

With a face as white as the steps of Jobson's, and a lip raised as if

snarling, Soames brushed past him and was gone....

On reaching home, and entering the little lighted hall with his

latchkey, the first thing that caught his eye was his wife's

gold-mounted umbrella lying on the rug chest. Flinging off his fur coat,

he hurried to the drawing-room.

The curtains were drawn for the night, a bright fire of cedar-logs

burned in the grate, and by its light he saw Irene sitting in her usual

corner on the sofa. He shut the door softly, and went towards her. She

did not move, and did not seem to see him.

"So you've come back?" he said. "Why are you sitting here in the dark?"

Then he caught sight of her face, so white and motionless that it seemed

as though the blood must have stopped flowing in her veins; and her

eyes, that looked enormous, like the great, wide, startled brown eyes of

an owl.

Huddled in her grey fur against the sofa cushions, she had a strange

resemblance to a captive owl, bunched in its soft feathers against the

wires of a cage. The supple erectness of her figure was gone, as though

she had been broken by cruel exercise; as though there were no longer

any reason for being beautiful, and supple, and erect.

"So you've come back," he repeated.

She never looked up, and never spoke, the firelight playing over her

motionless figure.

Suddenly she tried to rise, but he prevented her; it was then that he

understood.

She had come back like an animal wounded to death, not knowing where to

turn, not knowing what she was doing. The sight of her figure, huddled

in the fur, was enough.

He knew then for certain that Bosinney had been her lover; knew that she

had seen the report of his death--perhaps, like himself, had bought a

paper at the draughty corner of a street, and read it.

She had come back then of her own accord, to the cage she had pined to

be free of--and taking in all the tremendous significance of this, he

longed to cry: "Take your hated body, that I love, out of my house! Take

away that pitiful white face, so cruel and soft--before I crush it. Get

out of my sight; never let me see you again!"

And, at those unspoken words, he seemed to see her rise and move

away, like a woman in a terrible dream, from which she was fighting to

awake--rise and go out into the dark and cold, without a thought of him,

without so much as the knowledge of his presence.

Then he cried, contradicting what he had not yet spoken, "No; stay

there!" And turning away from her, he sat down in his accustomed chair

on the other side of the hearth.

They sat in silence.

And Soames thought: 'Why is all this? Why should I suffer so? What have

I done? It is not my fault!'

Again he looked at her, huddled like a bird that is shot and dying,

whose poor breast you see panting as the air is taken from it, whose

poor eyes look at you who have shot it, with a slow, soft, unseeing

look, taking farewell of all that is good--of the sun, and the air, and

its mate.

So they sat, by the firelight, in the silence, one on each side of the

hearth.

And the fume of the burning cedar logs, that he loved so well, seemed to

grip Soames by the throat till he could bear it no longer. And going

out into the hall he flung the door wide, to gulp down the cold air that

came in; then without hat or overcoat went out into the Square.

Along the garden rails a half-starved cat came rubbing her way towards

him, and Soames thought: 'Suffering! when will it cease, my suffering?'

At a front door across the way was a man of his acquaintance named

Rutter, scraping his boots, with an air of 'I am master here.' And

Soames walked on.

From far in the clear air the bells of the church where he and Irene had

been married were pealing in 'practice' for the advent of Christ, the

chimes ringing out above the sound of traffic. He felt a craving for

strong drink, to lull him to indifference, or rouse him to fury. If only

he could burst out of himself, out of this web that for the first

time in his life he felt around him. If only he could surrender to the

thought: 'Divorce her--turn her out! She has forgotten you. Forget her!'

If only he could surrender to the thought: 'Let her go--she has suffered

enough!'

If only he could surrender to the desire: 'Make a slave of her--she is

in your power!'

If only even he could surrender to the sudden vision: 'What does it all

matter?' Forget himself for a minute, forget that it mattered what he

did, forget that whatever he did he must sacrifice something.

If only he could act on an impulse!

He could forget nothing; surrender to no thought, vision, or desire; it

was all too serious; too close around him, an unbreakable cage.

On the far side of the Square newspaper boys were calling their evening

wares, and the ghoulish cries mingled and jangled with the sound of

those church bells.

Soames covered his ears. The thought flashed across him that but for

a chance, he himself, and not Bosinney, might be lying dead, and she,

instead of crouching there like a shot bird with those dying eyes....

Something soft touched his legs, the cat was rubbing herself against

them. And a sob that shook him from head to foot burst from Soames'

chest. Then all was still again in the dark, where the houses seemed to

stare at him, each with a master and mistress of its own, and a secret

story of happiness or sorrow.

And suddenly he saw that his own door was open, and black against the

light from the hall a man standing with his back turned. Something slid

too in his breast, and he stole up close behind.

He could see his own fur coat flung across the carved oak chair; the

Persian rugs; the silver bowls, the rows of porcelain plates arranged

along the walls, and this unknown man who was standing there.

And sharply he asked: "What is it you want, sir?"

The visitor turned. It was young Jolyon.

"The door was open," he said. "Might I see your wife for a minute, I

have a message for her?"

Soames gave him a strange, sidelong stare.

"My wife can see no one," he muttered doggedly.

Young Jolyon answered gently: "I shouldn't keep her a minute."

Soames brushed by him and barred the way.

"She can see no one," he said again.

Young Jolyon's glance shot past him into the hall, and Soames turned.

There in the drawing-room doorway stood Irene, her eyes were wild and

eager, her lips were parted, her hands outstretched. In the sight of

both men that light vanished from her face; her hands dropped to her

sides; she stood like stone.

Soames spun round, and met his visitor's eyes, and at the look he saw

in them, a sound like a snarl escaped him. He drew his lips back in the

ghost of a smile.

"This is my house," he said; "I manage my own affairs. I've told you

once--I tell you again; we are not at home."

And in young Jolyon's face he slammed the door.

THE FORSYTE SAGA--VOLUME II

By John Galsworthy

Contents: Indian Summer of a Forsyte

In Chancery

TO ANDRE CHEVRILLON

INDIAN SUMMER OF A FORSYTE

"And Summer's lease hath all

too short a date."

--Shakespeare

I

In the last day of May in the early 'nineties, about six o'clock of the

evening, old Jolyon Forsyte sat under the oak tree below the terrace

of his house at Robin Hill. He was waiting for the midges to bite him,

before abandoning the glory of the afternoon. His thin brown hand,

where blue veins stood out, held the end of a cigar in its tapering,

long-nailed fingers--a pointed polished nail had survived with him from

those earlier Victorian days when to touch nothing, even with the tips

of the fingers, had been so distinguished. His domed forehead, great

white moustache, lean cheeks, and long lean jaw were covered from the

westering sunshine by an old brown Panama hat. His legs were crossed; in

all his attitude was serenity and a kind of elegance, as of an old man

who every morning put eau de Cologne upon his silk handkerchief. At his

feet lay a woolly brown-and-white dog trying to be a Pomeranian--the dog

Balthasar between whom and old Jolyon primal aversion had changed into

attachment with the years. Close to his chair was a swing, and on the

swing was seated one of Holly's dolls--called 'Duffer Alice'--with

her body fallen over her legs and her doleful nose buried in a black

petticoat. She was never out of disgrace, so it did not matter to her

how she sat. Below the oak tree the lawn dipped down a bank, stretched

to the fernery, and, beyond that refinement, became fields, dropping to

the pond, the coppice, and the prospect--'Fine, remarkable'--at which

Swithin Forsyte, from under this very tree, had stared five years ago

when he drove down with Irene to look at the house. Old Jolyon had heard

of his brother's exploit--that drive which had become quite celebrated

on Forsyte 'Change. Swithin! And the fellow had gone and died, last

November, at the age of only seventy-nine, renewing the doubt whether

Forsytes could live for ever, which had first arisen when Aunt Ann

passed away. Died! and left only Jolyon and James, Roger and Nicholas

and Timothy, Julia, Hester, Susan! And old Jolyon thought: 'Eighty-five!

I don't feel it--except when I get that pain.'

His memory went searching. He had not felt his age since he had bought

his nephew Soames' ill-starred house and settled into it here at Robin

Hill over three years ago. It was as if he had been getting

younger every spring, living in the country with his son and his

grandchildren--June, and the little ones of the second marriage, Jolly

and Holly; living down here out of the racket of London and the cackle

of Forsyte 'Change,' free of his boards, in a delicious atmosphere of

no work and all play, with plenty of occupation in the perfecting and

mellowing of the house and its twenty acres, and in ministering to

the whims of Holly and Jolly. All the knots and crankiness, which had

gathered in his heart during that long and tragic business of June,

Soames, Irene his wife, and poor young Bosinney, had been smoothed out.

Even June had thrown off her melancholy at last--witness this travel in

Spain she was taking now with her father and her stepmother. Curiously

perfect peace was left by their departure; blissful, yet blank, because

his son was not there. Jo was never anything but a comfort and a

pleasure to him nowadays--an amiable chap; but women, somehow--even the

best--got a little on one's nerves, unless of course one admired them.

Far-off a cuckoo called; a wood-pigeon was cooing from the first

elm-tree in the field, and how the daisies and buttercups had sprung

up after the last mowing! The wind had got into the sou' west, too--a

delicious air, sappy! He pushed his hat back and let the sun fall on his

chin and cheek. Somehow, to-day, he wanted company--wanted a pretty face

to look at. People treated the old as if they wanted nothing. And with

the un-Forsytean philosophy which ever intruded on his soul, he thought:

'One's never had enough. With a foot in the grave one'll want something,

I shouldn't be surprised!' Down here--away from the exigencies of

affairs--his grandchildren, and the flowers, trees, birds of his little

domain, to say nothing of sun and moon and stars above them, said,

'Open, sesame,' to him day and night. And sesame had opened--how much,

perhaps, he did not know. He had always been responsive to what they had

begun to call 'Nature,' genuinely, almost religiously responsive, though

he had never lost his habit of calling a sunset a sunset and a view a

view, however deeply they might move him. But nowadays Nature actually

made him ache, he appreciated it so. Every one of these calm, bright,

lengthening days, with Holly's hand in his, and the dog Balthasar in

front looking studiously for what he never found, he would stroll,

watching the roses open, fruit budding on the walls, sunlight

brightening the oak leaves and saplings in the coppice, watching the

water-lily leaves unfold and glisten, and the silvery young corn of

the one wheat field; listening to the starlings and skylarks, and the

Alderney cows chewing the cud, flicking slow their tufted tails; and

every one of these fine days he ached a little from sheer love of it

all, feeling perhaps, deep down, that he had not very much longer

to enjoy it. The thought that some day--perhaps not ten years hence,

perhaps not five--all this world would be taken away from him, before he

had exhausted his powers of loving it, seemed to him in the nature of an

injustice brooding over his horizon. If anything came after this life,

it wouldn't be what he wanted; not Robin Hill, and flowers and birds and

pretty faces--too few, even now, of those about him! With the years

his dislike of humbug had increased; the orthodoxy he had worn in the

'sixties, as he had worn side-whiskers out of sheer exuberance, had long

dropped off, leaving him reverent before three things alone--beauty,

upright conduct, and the sense of property; and the greatest of these

now was beauty. He had always had wide interests, and, indeed could

still read The Times, but he was liable at any moment to put it down if

he heard a blackbird sing. Upright conduct, property--somehow, they were

tiring; the blackbirds and the sunsets never tired him, only gave him

an uneasy feeling that he could not get enough of them. Staring into the

stilly radiance of the early evening and at the little gold and white

flowers on the lawn, a thought came to him: This weather was like

the music of 'Orfeo,' which he had recently heard at Covent Garden. A

beautiful opera, not like Meyerbeer, nor even quite Mozart, but, in its

way, perhaps even more lovely; something classical and of the Golden Age

about it, chaste and mellow, and the Ravogli 'almost worthy of the old

days'--highest praise he could bestow. The yearning of Orpheus for the

beauty he was losing, for his love going down to Hades, as in life love

and beauty did go--the yearning which sang and throbbed through the

golden music, stirred also in the lingering beauty of the world that

evening. And with the tip of his cork-soled, elastic-sided boot he

involuntarily stirred the ribs of the dog Balthasar, causing the animal

to wake and attack his fleas; for though he was supposed to have none,

nothing could persuade him of the fact. When he had finished he rubbed

the place he had been scratching against his master's calf, and settled

down again with his chin over the instep of the disturbing boot. And

into old Jolyon's mind came a sudden recollection--a face he had seen

at that opera three weeks ago--Irene, the wife of his precious nephew

Soames, that man of property! Though he had not met her since the day

of the 'At Home' in his old house at Stanhope Gate, which celebrated his

granddaughter June's ill-starred engagement to young Bosinney, he had

remembered her at once, for he had always admired her--a very pretty

creature. After the death of young Bosinney, whose mistress she had so

reprehensibly become, he had heard that she had left Soames at once.

Goodness only knew what she had been doing since. That sight of her

face--a side view--in the row in front, had been literally the only

reminder these three years that she was still alive. No one ever spoke

of her. And yet Jo had told him something once--something which had

upset him completely. The boy had got it from George Forsyte,

he believed, who had seen Bosinney in the fog the day he was run

over--something which explained the young fellow's distress--an act

of Soames towards his wife--a shocking act. Jo had seen her, too,

that afternoon, after the news was out, seen her for a moment, and his

description had always lingered in old Jolyon's mind--'wild and lost'

he had called her. And next day June had gone there--bottled up her

feelings and gone there, and the maid had cried and told her how her

mistress had slipped out in the night and vanished. A tragic business

altogether! One thing was certain--Soames had never been able to lay

hands on her again. And he was living at Brighton, and journeying up

and down--a fitting fate, the man of property! For when he once took a

dislike to anyone--as he had to his nephew--old Jolyon never got over

it. He remembered still the sense of relief with which he had heard the

news of Irene's disappearance. It had been shocking to think of her a

prisoner in that house to which she must have wandered back, when Jo saw

her, wandered back for a moment--like a wounded animal to its hole after

seeing that news, 'Tragic death of an Architect,' in the street. Her

face had struck him very much the other night--more beautiful than he

had remembered, but like a mask, with something going on beneath it. A

young woman still--twenty-eight perhaps. Ah, well! Very likely she had

another lover by now. But at this subversive thought--for married women

should never love: once, even, had been too much--his instep rose, and

with it the dog Balthasar's head. The sagacious animal stood up and

looked into old Jolyon's face. 'Walk?' he seemed to say; and old Jolyon

answered: "Come on, old chap!"

Slowly, as was their wont, they crossed among the constellations of

buttercups and daisies, and entered the fernery. This feature, where

very little grew as yet, had been judiciously dropped below the level of

the lawn so that it might come up again on the level of the other lawn

and give the impression of irregularity, so important in horticulture.

Its rocks and earth were beloved of the dog Balthasar, who sometimes

found a mole there. Old Jolyon made a point of passing through it

because, though it was not beautiful, he intended that it should be,

some day, and he would think: 'I must get Varr to come down and look

at it; he's better than Beech.' For plants, like houses and human

complaints, required the best expert consideration. It was inhabited by

snails, and if accompanied by his grandchildren, he would point to one

and tell them the story of the little boy who said: 'Have plummers

got leggers, Mother? 'No, sonny.' 'Then darned if I haven't been and

swallowed a snileybob.' And when they skipped and clutched his hand,

thinking of the snileybob going down the little boy's 'red lane,' his

eyes would twinkle. Emerging from the fernery, he opened the wicket

gate, which just there led into the first field, a large and park-like

area, out of which, within brick walls, the vegetable garden had been

carved. Old Jolyon avoided this, which did not suit his mood, and made

down the hill towards the pond. Balthasar, who knew a water-rat or two,

gambolled in front, at the gait which marks an oldish dog who takes

the same walk every day. Arrived at the edge, old Jolyon stood, noting

another water-lily opened since yesterday; he would show it to Holly

to-morrow, when 'his little sweet' had got over the upset which had

followed on her eating a tomato at lunch--her little arrangements were

very delicate. Now that Jolly had gone to school--his first term--Holly

was with him nearly all day long, and he missed her badly. He felt that

pain too, which often bothered him now, a little dragging at his left

side. He looked back up the hill. Really, poor young Bosinney had made

an uncommonly good job of the house; he would have done very well for

himself if he had lived! And where was he now? Perhaps, still haunting

this, the site of his last work, of his tragic love affair. Or was

Philip Bosinney's spirit diffused in the general? Who could say? That

dog was getting his legs muddy! And he moved towards the coppice. There

had been the most delightful lot of bluebells, and he knew where some

still lingered like little patches of sky fallen in between the trees,

away out of the sun. He passed the cow-houses and the hen-houses there

installed, and pursued a path into the thick of the saplings, making for

one of the bluebell plots. Balthasar, preceding him once more, uttered

a low growl. Old Jolyon stirred him with his foot, but the dog remained

motionless, just where there was no room to pass, and the hair rose

slowly along the centre of his woolly back. Whether from the growl and

the look of the dog's stivered hair, or from the sensation which a man

feels in a wood, old Jolyon also felt something move along his spine.

And then the path turned, and there was an old mossy log, and on it a

woman sitting. Her face was turned away, and he had just time to think:

'She's trespassing--I must have a board put up!' before she turned.

Powers above! The face he had seen at the opera--the very woman he had

just been thinking of! In that confused moment he saw things blurred,

as if a spirit--queer effect--the slant of sunlight perhaps on her

violet-grey frock! And then she rose and stood smiling, her head a

little to one side. Old Jolyon thought: 'How pretty she is!' She did not

speak, neither did he; and he realized why with a certain admiration.

She was here no doubt because of some memory, and did not mean to try

and get out of it by vulgar explanation.

"Don't let that dog touch your frock," he said; "he's got wet feet. Come

here, you!"

But the dog Balthasar went on towards the visitor, who put her hand down

and stroked his head. Old Jolyon said quickly:

"I saw you at the opera the other night; you didn't notice me."

"Oh, yes! I did."

He felt a subtle flattery in that, as though she had added: 'Do you

think one could miss seeing you?'

"They're all in Spain," he remarked abruptly. "I'm alone; I drove up for

the opera. The Ravogli's good. Have you seen the cow-houses?"

In a situation so charged with mystery and something very like emotion

he moved instinctively towards that bit of property, and she moved

beside him. Her figure swayed faintly, like the best kind of French

figures; her dress, too, was a sort of French grey. He noticed two or

three silver threads in her amber-coloured hair, strange hair with those

dark eyes of hers, and that creamy-pale face. A sudden sidelong look

from the velvety brown eyes disturbed him. It seemed to come from deep

and far, from another world almost, or at all events from some one not

living very much in this. And he said mechanically:

"Where are you living now?"

"I have a little flat in Chelsea."

He did not want to hear what she was doing, did not want to hear

anything; but the perverse word came out:

"Alone?"

She nodded. It was a relief to know that. And it came into his mind

that, but for a twist of fate, she would have been mistress of this

coppice, showing these cow-houses to him, a visitor.

"All Alderneys," he muttered; "they give the best milk. This one's a

pretty creature. Woa, Myrtle!"

The fawn-coloured cow, with eyes as soft and brown as Irene's own, was

standing absolutely still, not having long been milked. She looked round

at them out of the corner of those lustrous, mild, cynical eyes, and

from her grey lips a little dribble of saliva threaded its way towards

the straw. The scent of hay and vanilla and ammonia rose in the dim

light of the cool cow-house; and old Jolyon said:

"You must come up and have some dinner with me. I'll send you home in

the carriage."

He perceived a struggle going on within her; natural, no doubt, with her

memories. But he wanted her company; a pretty face, a charming figure,

beauty! He had been alone all the afternoon. Perhaps his eyes were

wistful, for she answered: "Thank you, Uncle Jolyon. I should like to."

He rubbed his hands, and said:

"Capital! Let's go up, then!" And, preceded by the dog Balthasar, they

ascended through the field. The sun was almost level in their faces now,

and he could see, not only those silver threads, but little lines, just

deep enough to stamp her beauty with a coin-like fineness--the special

look of life unshared with others. "I'll take her in by the terrace," he

thought: "I won't make a common visitor of her."

"What do you do all day?" he said.

"Teach music; I have another interest, too."

"Work!" said old Jolyon, picking up the doll from off the swing, and

smoothing its black petticoat. "Nothing like it, is there? I don't do

any now. I'm getting on. What interest is that?"

"Trying to help women who've come to grief." Old Jolyon did not quite

understand. "To grief?" he repeated; then realised with a shock that

she meant exactly what he would have meant himself if he had used

that expression. Assisting the Magdalenes of London! What a weird and

terrifying interest! And, curiosity overcoming his natural shrinking, he

asked:

"Why? What do you do for them?"

"Not much. I've no money to spare. I can only give sympathy and food

sometimes."

Involuntarily old Jolyon's hand sought his purse. He said hastily: "How

d'you get hold of them?"

"I go to a hospital."

"A hospital! Phew!"

"What hurts me most is that once they nearly all had some sort of

beauty."

Old Jolyon straightened the doll. "Beauty!" he ejaculated: "Ha! Yes! A

sad business!" and he moved towards the house. Through a French window,

under sun-blinds not yet drawn up, he preceded her into the room

where he was wont to study The Times and the sheets of an agricultural

magazine, with huge illustrations of mangold wurzels, and the like,

which provided Holly with material for her paint brush.

"Dinner's in half an hour. You'd like to wash your hands! I'll take you

to June's room."

He saw her looking round eagerly; what changes since she had last

visited this house with her husband, or her lover, or both perhaps--he

did not know, could not say! All that was dark, and he wished to leave

it so. But what changes! And in the hall he said:

"My boy Jo's a painter, you know. He's got a lot of taste. It isn't

mine, of course, but I've let him have his way."

She was standing very still, her eyes roaming through the hall and music

room, as it now was--all thrown into one, under the great skylight. Old

Jolyon had an odd impression of her. Was she trying to conjure somebody

from the shades of that space where the colouring was all pearl-grey and

silver? He would have had gold himself; more lively and solid. But Jo

had French tastes, and it had come out shadowy like that, with an effect

as of the fume of cigarettes the chap was always smoking, broken here

and there by a little blaze of blue or crimson colour. It was not

his dream! Mentally he had hung this space with those gold-framed

masterpieces of still and stiller life which he had bought in days when

quantity was precious. And now where were they? Sold for a song! That

something which made him, alone among Forsytes, move with the times

had warned him against the struggle to retain them. But in his study he

still had 'Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset.'

He began to mount the stairs with her, slowly, for he felt his side.

"These are the bathrooms," he said, "and other arrangements. I've had

them tiled. The nurseries are along there. And this is Jo's and his

wife's. They all communicate. But you remember, I expect."

Irene nodded. They passed on, up the gallery and entered a large room

with a small bed, and several windows.

"This is mine," he said. The walls were covered with the photographs of

children and watercolour sketches, and he added doubtfully:

"These are Jo's. The view's first-rate. You can see the Grand Stand at

Epsom in clear weather."

The sun was down now, behind the house, and over the 'prospect' a

luminous haze had settled, emanation of the long and prosperous day. Few

houses showed, but fields and trees faintly glistened, away to a loom of

downs.

"The country's changing," he said abruptly, "but there it'll be when

we're all gone. Look at those thrushes--the birds are sweet here in the

mornings. I'm glad to have washed my hands of London."

Her face was close to the window pane, and he was struck by its mournful

look. 'Wish I could make her look happy!' he thought. 'A pretty face,

but sad!' And taking up his can of hot water he went out into the

gallery.

"This is June's room," he said, opening the next door and putting the

can down; "I think you'll find everything." And closing the door behind

her he went back to his own room. Brushing his hair with his great ebony

brushes, and dabbing his forehead with eau de Cologne, he mused. She had

come so strangely--a sort of visitation; mysterious, even romantic, as

if his desire for company, for beauty, had been fulfilled by whatever

it was which fulfilled that sort of thing. And before the mirror he

straightened his still upright figure, passed the brushes over his great

white moustache, touched up his eyebrows with eau de Cologne, and rang

the bell.

"I forgot to let them know that I have a lady to dinner with me. Let

cook do something extra, and tell Beacon to have the landau and pair at

half-past ten to drive her back to Town to-night. Is Miss Holly asleep?"

The maid thought not. And old Jolyon, passing down the gallery, stole

on tiptoe towards the nursery, and opened the door whose hinges he kept

specially oiled that he might slip in and out in the evenings without

being heard.

But Holly was asleep, and lay like a miniature Madonna, of that

type which the old painters could not tell from Venus, when they had

completed her. Her long dark lashes clung to her cheeks; on her face was

perfect peace--her little arrangements were evidently all right again.

And old Jolyon, in the twilight of the room, stood adoring her! It was

so charming, solemn, and loving--that little face. He had more than his

share of the blessed capacity of living again in the young. They were

to him his future life--all of a future life that his fundamental pagan

sanity perhaps admitted. There she was with everything before her, and

his blood--some of it--in her tiny veins. There she was, his little

companion, to be made as happy as ever he could make her, so that she

knew nothing but love. His heart swelled, and he went out, stilling the

sound of his patent-leather boots. In the corridor an eccentric notion

attacked him: To think that children should come to that which Irene had

told him she was helping! Women who were all, once, little things like

this one sleeping there! 'I must give her a cheque!' he mused; 'Can't

bear to think of them!' They had never borne reflecting on, those poor

outcasts; wounding too deeply the core of true refinement hidden under

layers of conformity to the sense of property--wounding too grievously

the deepest thing in him--a love of beauty which could give him, even

now, a flutter of the heart, thinking of his evening in the society of a

pretty woman. And he went downstairs, through the swinging doors, to the

back regions. There, in the wine-cellar, was a hock worth at least two

pounds a bottle, a Steinberg Cabinet, better than any Johannisberg

that ever went down throat; a wine of perfect bouquet, sweet as a

nectarine--nectar indeed! He got a bottle out, handling it like a baby,

and holding it level to the light, to look. Enshrined in its coat

of dust, that mellow coloured, slender-necked bottle gave him deep

pleasure. Three years to settle down again since the move from

Town--ought to be in prime condition! Thirty-five years ago he had

bought it--thank God he had kept his palate, and earned the right to

drink it. She would appreciate this; not a spice of acidity in a dozen.

He wiped the bottle, drew the cork with his own hands, put his nose

down, inhaled its perfume, and went back to the music room.

Irene was standing by the piano; she had taken off her hat and a lace

scarf she had been wearing, so that her gold-coloured hair was visible,

and the pallor of her neck. In her grey frock she made a pretty picture

for old Jolyon, against the rosewood of the piano.

He gave her his arm, and solemnly they went. The room, which had been

designed to enable twenty-four people to dine in comfort, held now but

a little round table. In his present solitude the big dining-table

oppressed old Jolyon; he had caused it to be removed till his son came

back. Here in the company of two really good copies of Raphael Madonnas

he was wont to dine alone. It was the only disconsolate hour of his day,

this summer weather. He had never been a large eater, like that great

chap Swithin, or Sylvanus Heythorp, or Anthony Thornworthy, those

cronies of past times; and to dine alone, overlooked by the Madonnas,

was to him but a sorrowful occupation, which he got through quickly,

that he might come to the more spiritual enjoyment of his coffee and

cigar. But this evening was a different matter! His eyes twinkled at her

across the little table and he spoke of Italy and Switzerland, telling

her stories of his travels there, and other experiences which he could

no longer recount to his son and grand-daughter because they knew them.

This fresh audience was precious to him; he had never become one of

those old men who ramble round and round the fields of reminiscence.

Himself quickly fatigued by the insensitive, he instinctively avoided

fatiguing others, and his natural flirtatiousness towards beauty guarded

him specially in his relations with a woman. He would have liked to draw

her out, but though she murmured and smiled and seemed to be enjoying

what he told her, he remained conscious of that mysterious remoteness

which constituted half her fascination. He could not bear women

who threw their shoulders and eyes at you, and chattered away; or

hard-mouthed women who laid down the law and knew more than you did.

There was only one quality in a woman that appealed to him--charm;

and the quieter it was, the more he liked it. And this one had charm,

shadowy as afternoon sunlight on those Italian hills and valleys he had

loved. The feeling, too, that she was, as it were, apart, cloistered,

made her seem nearer to himself, a strangely desirable companion. When

a man is very old and quite out of the running, he loves to feel secure

from the rivalries of youth, for he would still be first in the heart

of beauty. And he drank his hock, and watched her lips, and felt nearly

young. But the dog Balthasar lay watching her lips too, and despising

in his heart the interruptions of their talk, and the tilting of those

greenish glasses full of a golden fluid which was distasteful to him.

The light was just failing when they went back into the music-room. And,

cigar in mouth, old Jolyon said:

"Play me some Chopin."

By the cigars they smoke, and the composers they love, ye shall know

the texture of men's souls. Old Jolyon could not bear a strong cigar

or Wagner's music. He loved Beethoven and Mozart, Handel and Gluck, and

Schumann, and, for some occult reason, the operas of Meyerbeer; but of

late years he had been seduced by Chopin, just as in painting he

had succumbed to Botticelli. In yielding to these tastes he had been

conscious of divergence from the standard of the Golden Age. Their

poetry was not that of Milton and Byron and Tennyson; of Raphael and

Titian; Mozart and Beethoven. It was, as it were, behind a veil; their

poetry hit no one in the face, but slipped its fingers under the ribs

and turned and twisted, and melted up the heart. And, never certain

that this was healthy, he did not care a rap so long as he could see the

pictures of the one or hear the music of the other.

Irene sat down at the piano under the electric lamp festooned with

pearl-grey, and old Jolyon, in an armchair, whence he could see her,

crossed his legs and drew slowly at his cigar. She sat a few moments

with her hands on the keys, evidently searching her mind for what to

give him. Then she began and within old Jolyon there arose a sorrowful

pleasure, not quite like anything else in the world. He fell slowly into

a trance, interrupted only by the movements of taking the cigar out of

his mouth at long intervals, and replacing it. She was there, and the

hock within him, and the scent of tobacco; but there, too, was a world

of sunshine lingering into moonlight, and pools with storks upon them,

and bluish trees above, glowing with blurs of wine-red roses, and fields

of lavender where milk-white cows were grazing, and a woman all shadowy,

with dark eyes and a white neck, smiled, holding out her arms; and

through air which was like music a star dropped and was caught on a

cow's horn. He opened his eyes. Beautiful piece; she played well--the

touch of an angel! And he closed them again. He felt miraculously sad

and happy, as one does, standing under a lime-tree in full honey flower.

Not live one's own life again, but just stand there and bask in the

smile of a woman's eyes, and enjoy the bouquet! And he jerked his hand;

the dog Balthasar had reached up and licked it.

"Beautiful!" He said: "Go on--more Chopin!"

She began to play again. This time the resemblance between her and

'Chopin' struck him. The swaying he had noticed in her walk was in her

playing too, and the Nocturne she had chosen and the soft darkness of

her eyes, the light on her hair, as of moonlight from a golden moon.

Seductive, yes; but nothing of Delilah in her or in that music. A long

blue spiral from his cigar ascended and dispersed. 'So we go out!' he

thought. 'No more beauty! Nothing?'

Again Irene stopped.

"Would you like some Gluck? He used to write his music in a sunlit

garden, with a bottle of Rhine wine beside him."

"Ah! yes. Let's have 'Orfeo.'" Round about him now were fields of gold

and silver flowers, white forms swaying in the sunlight, bright birds

flying to and fro. All was summer. Lingering waves of sweetness and

regret flooded his soul. Some cigar ash dropped, and taking out a silk

handkerchief to brush it off, he inhaled a mingled scent as of snuff and

eau de Cologne. 'Ah!' he thought, 'Indian summer--that's all!' and he

said: "You haven't played me 'Che faro.'"

She did not answer; did not move. He was conscious of something--some

strange upset. Suddenly he saw her rise and turn away, and a pang of

remorse shot through him. What a clumsy chap! Like Orpheus, she of

course--she too was looking for her lost one in the hall of memory! And

disturbed to the heart, he got up from his chair. She had gone to the

great window at the far end. Gingerly he followed. Her hands were folded

over her breast; he could just see her cheek, very white. And, quite

emotionalized, he said:

"There, there, my love!" The words had escaped him mechanically, for

they were those he used to Holly when she had a pain, but their effect

was instantaneously distressing. She raised her arms, covered her face

with them, and wept.

Old Jolyon stood gazing at her with eyes very deep from age. The

passionate shame she seemed feeling at her abandonment, so unlike the

control and quietude of her whole presence was as if she had never

before broken down in the presence of another being.

"There, there--there, there!" he murmured, and putting his hand out

reverently, touched her. She turned, and leaned the arms which covered

her face against him. Old Jolyon stood very still, keeping one thin hand

on her shoulder. Let her cry her heart out--it would do her good.

And the dog Balthasar, puzzled, sat down on his stern to examine them.

The window was still open, the curtains had not been drawn, the last of

daylight from without mingled with faint intrusion from the lamp within;

there was a scent of new-mown grass. With the wisdom of a long life old

Jolyon did not speak. Even grief sobbed itself out in time; only Time

was good for sorrow--Time who saw the passing of each mood, each emotion

in turn; Time the layer-to-rest. There came into his mind the words: 'As

panteth the hart after cooling streams'--but they were of no use to him.

Then, conscious of a scent of violets, he knew she was drying her eyes.

He put his chin forward, pressed his moustache against her forehead, and

felt her shake with a quivering of her whole body, as of a tree which

shakes itself free of raindrops. She put his hand to her lips, as if

saying: "All over now! Forgive me!"

The kiss filled him with a strange comfort; he led her back to where she

had been so upset. And the dog Balthasar, following, laid the bone of

one of the cutlets they had eaten at their feet.

Anxious to obliterate the memory of that emotion, he could think of

nothing better than china; and moving with her slowly from cabinet to

cabinet, he kept taking up bits of Dresden and Lowestoft and Chelsea,

turning them round and round with his thin, veined hands, whose skin,

faintly freckled, had such an aged look.

"I bought this at Jobson's," he would say; "cost me thirty pounds.

It's very old. That dog leaves his bones all over the place. This old

'ship-bowl' I picked up at the sale when that precious rip, the Marquis,

came to grief. But you don't remember. Here's a nice piece of Chelsea.

Now, what would you say this was?" And he was comforted, feeling that,

with her taste, she was taking a real interest in these things; for,

after all, nothing better composes the nerves than a doubtful piece of

china.

When the crunch of the carriage wheels was heard at last, he said:

"You must come again; you must come to lunch, then I can show you these

by daylight, and my little sweet--she's a dear little thing. This dog

seems to have taken a fancy to you."

For Balthasar, feeling that she was about to leave, was rubbing his side

against her leg. Going out under the porch with her, he said:

"He'll get you up in an hour and a quarter. Take this for your

protegees," and he slipped a cheque for fifty pounds into her hand. He

saw her brightened eyes, and heard her murmur: "Oh! Uncle Jolyon!" and

a real throb of pleasure went through him. That meant one or two poor

creatures helped a little, and it meant that she would come again. He

put his hand in at the window and grasped hers once more. The carriage

rolled away. He stood looking at the moon and the shadows of the trees,

and thought: 'A sweet night! She...!'

II

Two days of rain, and summer set in bland and sunny. Old Jolyon walked

and talked with Holly. At first he felt taller and full of a new vigour;

then he felt restless. Almost every afternoon they would enter the

coppice, and walk as far as the log. 'Well, she's not there!' he would

think, 'of course not!' And he would feel a little shorter, and drag his

feet walking up the hill home, with his hand clapped to his left side.

Now and then the thought would move in him: 'Did she come--or did I

dream it?' and he would stare at space, while the dog Balthasar stared

at him. Of course she would not come again! He opened the letters from

Spain with less excitement. They were not returning till July; he felt,

oddly, that he could bear it. Every day at dinner he screwed up his eyes

and looked at where she had sat. She was not there, so he unscrewed his

eyes again.

On the seventh afternoon he thought: 'I must go up and get some boots.'

He ordered Beacon, and set out. Passing from Putney towards Hyde Park

he reflected: 'I might as well go to Chelsea and see her.' And he called

out: "Just drive me to where you took that lady the other night." The

coachman turned his broad red face, and his juicy lips answered: "The

lady in grey, sir?"

"Yes, the lady in grey." What other ladies were there! Stodgy chap!

The carriage stopped before a small three-storied block of flats,

standing a little back from the river. With a practised eye old Jolyon

saw that they were cheap. 'I should think about sixty pound a year,' he

mused; and entering, he looked at the name-board. The name 'Forsyte' was

not on it, but against 'First Floor, Flat C' were the words: 'Mrs.

Irene Heron.' Ah! She had taken her maiden name again! And somehow this

pleased him. He went upstairs slowly, feeling his side a little.

He stood a moment, before ringing, to lose the feeling of drag and

fluttering there. She would not be in! And then--Boots! The thought was

black. What did he want with boots at his age? He could not wear out all

those he had.

"Your mistress at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Say Mr. Jolyon Forsyte."

"Yes, sir, will you come this way?"

Old Jolyon followed a very little maid--not more than sixteen one would

say--into a very small drawing-room where the sun-blinds were drawn.

It held a cottage piano and little else save a vague fragrance and

good taste. He stood in the middle, with his top hat in his hand, and

thought: 'I expect she's very badly off!' There was a mirror above the

fireplace, and he saw himself reflected. An old-looking chap! He heard

a rustle, and turned round. She was so close that his moustache almost

brushed her forehead, just under her hair.

"I was driving up," he said. "Thought I'd look in on you, and ask you

how you got up the other night."

And, seeing her smile, he felt suddenly relieved. She was really glad to

see him, perhaps.

"Would you like to put on your hat and come for a drive in the Park?"

But while she was gone to put her hat on, he frowned. The Park! James

and Emily! Mrs. Nicholas, or some other member of his precious family

would be there very likely, prancing up and down. And they would go and

wag their tongues about having seen him with her, afterwards. Better

not! He did not wish to revive the echoes of the past on

Forsyte 'Change. He removed a white hair from the lapel of his

closely-buttoned-up frock coat, and passed his hand over his cheeks,

moustache, and square chin. It felt very hollow there under the

cheekbones. He had not been eating much lately--he had better get that

little whippersnapper who attended Holly to give him a tonic. But she

had come back and when they were in the carriage, he said:

"Suppose we go and sit in Kensington Gardens instead?" and added with

a twinkle: "No prancing up and down there," as if she had been in the

secret of his thoughts.

Leaving the carriage, they entered those select precincts, and strolled

towards the water.

"You've gone back to your maiden name, I see," he said: "I'm not sorry."

She slipped her hand under his arm: "Has June forgiven me, Uncle

Jolyon?"

He answered gently: "Yes--yes; of course, why not?"

"And have you?"

"I? I forgave you as soon as I saw how the land really lay." And perhaps

he had; his instinct had always been to forgive the beautiful.

She drew a deep breath. "I never regretted--I couldn't. Did you ever

love very deeply, Uncle Jolyon?"

At that strange question old Jolyon stared before him. Had he? He did

not seem to remember that he ever had. But he did not like to say this

to the young woman whose hand was touching his arm, whose life was

suspended, as it were, by memory of a tragic love. And he thought: 'If

I had met you when I was young I--I might have made a fool of myself,

perhaps.' And a longing to escape in generalities beset him.

"Love's a queer thing," he said, "fatal thing often. It was the

Greeks--wasn't it?--made love into a goddess; they were right, I dare

say, but then they lived in the Golden Age."

"Phil adored them."

Phil! The word jarred him, for suddenly--with his power to see all round

a thing, he perceived why she was putting up with him like this. She

wanted to talk about her lover! Well! If it was any pleasure to her! And

he said: "Ah! There was a bit of the sculptor in him, I fancy."

"Yes. He loved balance and symmetry; he loved the whole-hearted way the

Greeks gave themselves to art."

Balance! The chap had no balance at all, if he remembered; as for

symmetry--clean-built enough he was, no doubt; but those queer eyes of

his, and high cheek-bones--Symmetry?

"You're of the Golden Age, too, Uncle Jolyon."

Old Jolyon looked round at her. Was she chaffing him? No, her eyes

were soft as velvet. Was she flattering him? But if so, why? There was

nothing to be had out of an old chap like him.

"Phil thought so. He used to say: 'But I can never tell him that I

admire him.'"

Ah! There it was again. Her dead lover; her desire to talk of him! And

he pressed her arm, half resentful of those memories, half grateful, as

if he recognised what a link they were between herself and him.

"He was a very talented young fellow," he murmured. "It's hot; I feel

the heat nowadays. Let's sit down."

They took two chairs beneath a chestnut tree whose broad leaves covered

them from the peaceful glory of the afternoon. A pleasure to sit there

and watch her, and feel that she liked to be with him. And the wish to

increase that liking, if he could, made him go on:

"I expect he showed you a side of him I never saw. He'd be at his best

with you. His ideas of art were a little new--to me "--he had stiffed

the word 'fangled.'

"Yes: but he used to say you had a real sense of beauty." Old Jolyon

thought: 'The devil he did!' but answered with a twinkle: "Well, I have,

or I shouldn't be sitting here with you." She was fascinating when she

smiled with her eyes, like that!

"He thought you had one of those hearts that never grow old. Phil had

real insight."

He was not taken in by this flattery spoken out of the past, out of a

longing to talk of her dead lover--not a bit; and yet it was precious

to hear, because she pleased his eyes and heart which--quite true!--had

never grown old. Was that because--unlike her and her dead lover, he had

never loved to desperation, had always kept his balance, his sense of

symmetry. Well! It had left him power, at eighty-four, to admire beauty.

And he thought, 'If I were a painter or a sculptor! But I'm an old chap.

Make hay while the sun shines.'

A couple with arms entwined crossed on the grass before them, at the

edge of the shadow from their tree. The sunlight fell cruelly on their

pale, squashed, unkempt young faces. "We're an ugly lot!" said old

Jolyon suddenly. "It amazes me to see how--love triumphs over that."

"Love triumphs over everything!"

"The young think so," he muttered.

"Love has no age, no limit, and no death."

With that glow in her pale face, her breast heaving, her eyes so

large and dark and soft, she looked like Venus come to life! But this

extravagance brought instant reaction, and, twinkling, he said: "Well,

if it had limits, we shouldn't be born; for by George! it's got a lot to

put up with."

Then, removing his top hat, he brushed it round with a cuff. The great

clumsy thing heated his forehead; in these days he often got a rush of

blood to the head--his circulation was not what it had been.

She still sat gazing straight before her, and suddenly she murmured:

"It's strange enough that I'm alive."

Those words of Jo's 'Wild and lost' came back to him.

"Ah!" he said: "my son saw you for a moment--that day."

"Was it your son? I heard a voice in the hall; I thought for a second it

was--Phil."

Old Jolyon saw her lips tremble. She put her hand over them, took it

away again, and went on calmly: "That night I went to the Embankment; a

woman caught me by the dress. She told me about herself. When one knows

that others suffer, one's ashamed."

"One of those?"

She nodded, and horror stirred within old Jolyon, the horror of one who

has never known a struggle with desperation. Almost against his will he

muttered: "Tell me, won't you?"

"I didn't care whether I lived or died. When you're like that, Fate

ceases to want to kill you. She took care of me three days--she never

left me. I had no money. That's why I do what I can for them, now."

But old Jolyon was thinking: 'No money!' What fate could compare with

that? Every other was involved in it.

"I wish you had come to me," he said. "Why didn't you?" But Irene did

not answer.

"Because my name was Forsyte, I suppose? Or was it June who kept you

away? How are you getting on now?" His eyes involuntarily swept her

body. Perhaps even now she was--! And yet she wasn't thin--not really!

"Oh! with my fifty pounds a year, I make just enough." The answer did

not reassure him; he had lost confidence. And that fellow Soames! But

his sense of justice stifled condemnation. No, she would certainly have

died rather than take another penny from him. Soft as she looked, there

must be strength in her somewhere--strength and fidelity. But what

business had young Bosinney to have got run over and left her stranded

like this!

"Well, you must come to me now," he said, "for anything you want, or I

shall be quite cut up." And putting on his hat, he rose. "Let's go and

get some tea. I told that lazy chap to put the horses up for an hour,

and come for me at your place. We'll take a cab presently; I can't walk

as I used to."

He enjoyed that stroll to the Kensington end of the gardens--the sound

of her voice, the glancing of her eyes, the subtle beauty of a charming

form moving beside him. He enjoyed their tea at Ruffel's in the High

Street, and came out thence with a great box of chocolates swung on his

little finger. He enjoyed the drive back to Chelsea in a hansom, smoking

his cigar. She had promised to come down next Sunday and play to him

again, and already in thought he was plucking carnations and early roses

for her to carry back to town. It was a pleasure to give her a little

pleasure, if it WERE pleasure from an old chap like him! The carriage

was already there when they arrived. Just like that fellow, who was

always late when he was wanted! Old Jolyon went in for a minute to

say good-bye. The little dark hall of the flat was impregnated with a

disagreeable odour of patchouli, and on a bench against the wall--its

only furniture--he saw a figure sitting. He heard Irene say softly:

"Just one minute." In the little drawing-room when the door was shut, he

asked gravely: "One of your protegees?"

"Yes. Now thanks to you, I can do something for her."

He stood, staring, and stroking that chin whose strength had frightened

so many in its time. The idea of her thus actually in contact with this

outcast grieved and frightened him. What could she do for them? Nothing.

Only soil and make trouble for herself, perhaps. And he said: "Take

care, my dear! The world puts the worst construction on everything."

"I know that."

He was abashed by her quiet smile. "Well then--Sunday," he murmured:

"Good-bye."

She put her cheek forward for him to kiss.

"Good-bye," he said again; "take care of yourself." And he went out,

not looking towards the figure on the bench. He drove home by way of

Hammersmith; that he might stop at a place he knew of and tell them to

send her in two dozen of their best Burgundy. She must want picking-up

sometimes! Only in Richmond Park did he remember that he had gone up to

order himself some boots, and was surprised that he could have had so

paltry an idea.

III

The little spirits of the past which throng an old man's days had never

pushed their faces up to his so seldom as in the seventy hours elapsing

before Sunday came. The spirit of the future, with the charm of the

unknown, put up her lips instead. Old Jolyon was not restless now, and

paid no visits to the log, because she was coming to lunch. There is

wonderful finality about a meal; it removes a world of doubts, for no

one misses meals except for reasons beyond control. He played many games

with Holly on the lawn, pitching them up to her who was batting so as

to be ready to bowl to Jolly in the holidays. For she was not a Forsyte,

but Jolly was--and Forsytes always bat, until they have resigned and

reached the age of eighty-five. The dog Balthasar, in attendance, lay on

the ball as often as he could, and the page-boy fielded, till his face

was like the harvest moon. And because the time was getting shorter,

each day was longer and more golden than the last. On Friday night he

took a liver pill, his side hurt him rather, and though it was not the

liver side, there is no remedy like that. Anyone telling him that he had

found a new excitement in life and that excitement was not good for him,

would have been met by one of those steady and rather defiant looks

of his deep-set iron-grey eyes, which seemed to say: 'I know my own

business best.' He always had and always would.

On Sunday morning, when Holly had gone with her governess to church, he

visited the strawberry beds. There, accompanied by the dog Balthasar, he

examined the plants narrowly and succeeded in finding at least two dozen

berries which were really ripe. Stooping was not good for him, and

he became very dizzy and red in the forehead. Having placed the

strawberries in a dish on the dining-table, he washed his hands and

bathed his forehead with eau de Cologne. There, before the mirror, it

occurred to him that he was thinner. What a 'threadpaper' he had been

when he was young! It was nice to be slim--he could not bear a fat chap;

and yet perhaps his cheeks were too thin! She was to arrive by train at

half-past twelve and walk up, entering from the road past Drage's farm

at the far end of the coppice. And, having looked into June's room to

see that there was hot water ready, he set forth to meet her, leisurely,

for his heart was beating. The air smelled sweet, larks sang, and the

Grand Stand at Epsom was visible. A perfect day! On just such a one, no

doubt, six years ago, Soames had brought young Bosinney down with him

to look at the site before they began to build. It was Bosinney who had

pitched on the exact spot for the house--as June had often told him.

In these days he was thinking much about that young fellow, as if his

spirit were really haunting the field of his last work, on the chance of

seeing--her. Bosinney--the one man who had possessed her heart, to whom

she had given her whole self with rapture! At his age one could not,

of course, imagine such things, but there stirred in him a queer vague

aching--as it were the ghost of an impersonal jealousy; and a feeling,

too, more generous, of pity for that love so early lost. All over in a

few poor months! Well, well! He looked at his watch before entering the

coppice--only a quarter past, twenty-five minutes to wait! And then,

turning the corner of the path, he saw her exactly where he had seen her

the first time, on the log; and realised that she must have come by the

earlier train to sit there alone for a couple of hours at least. Two

hours of her society missed! What memory could make that log so dear to

her? His face showed what he was thinking, for she said at once:

"Forgive me, Uncle Jolyon; it was here that I first knew."

"Yes, yes; there it is for you whenever you like. You're looking a

little Londony; you're giving too many lessons."

That she should have to give lessons worried him. Lessons to a parcel of

young girls thumping out scales with their thick fingers.

"Where do you go to give them?" he asked.

"They're mostly Jewish families, luckily."

Old Jolyon stared; to all Forsytes Jews seem strange and doubtful.

"They love music, and they're very kind."

"They had better be, by George!" He took her arm--his side always hurt

him a little going uphill--and said:

"Did you ever see anything like those buttercups? They came like that in

a night."

Her eyes seemed really to fly over the field, like bees after the

flowers and the honey. "I wanted you to see them--wouldn't let them

turn the cows in yet." Then, remembering that she had come to talk about

Bosinney, he pointed to the clock-tower over the stables:

"I expect he wouldn't have let me put that there--had no notion of time,

if I remember."

But, pressing his arm to her, she talked of flowers instead, and he knew

it was done that he might not feel she came because of her dead lover.

"The best flower I can show you," he said, with a sort of triumph, "is

my little sweet. She'll be back from Church directly. There's something

about her which reminds me a little of you," and it did not seem to him

peculiar that he had put it thus, instead of saying: "There's something

about you which reminds me a little of her." Ah! And here she was!

Holly, followed closely by her elderly French governess, whose digestion

had been ruined twenty-two years ago in the siege of Strasbourg, came

rushing towards them from under the oak tree. She stopped about a dozen

yards away, to pat Balthasar and pretend that this was all she had in

her mind. Old Jolyon, who knew better, said:

"Well, my darling, here's the lady in grey I promised you."

Holly raised herself and looked up. He watched the two of them with a

twinkle, Irene smiling, Holly beginning with grave inquiry, passing

into a shy smile too, and then to something deeper. She had a sense of

beauty, that child--knew what was what! He enjoyed the sight of the kiss

between them.

"Mrs. Heron, Mam'zelle Beauce. Well, Mam'zelle--good sermon?"

For, now that he had not much more time before him, the only part of

the service connected with this world absorbed what interest in church

remained to him. Mam'zelle Beauce stretched out a spidery hand clad in

a black kid glove--she had been in the best families--and the rather sad

eyes of her lean yellowish face seemed to ask: "Are you well-brrred?"

Whenever Holly or Jolly did anything unpleasing to her--a not uncommon

occurrence--she would say to them: "The little Tayleurs never did

that--they were such well-brrred little children." Jolly hated the

little Tayleurs; Holly wondered dreadfully how it was she fell so short

of them. 'A thin rum little soul,' old Jolyon thought her--Mam'zelle

Beauce.

Luncheon was a successful meal, the mushrooms which he himself had

picked in the mushroom house, his chosen strawberries, and another

bottle of the Steinberg cabinet filled him with a certain aromatic

spirituality, and a conviction that he would have a touch of eczema

to-morrow.

After lunch they sat under the oak tree drinking Turkish coffee. It was

no matter of grief to him when Mademoiselle Beauce withdrew to write

her Sunday letter to her sister, whose future had been endangered in

the past by swallowing a pin--an event held up daily in warning to the

children to eat slowly and digest what they had eaten. At the foot of

the bank, on a carriage rug, Holly and the dog Balthasar teased and

loved each other, and in the shade old Jolyon with his legs crossed and

his cigar luxuriously savoured, gazed at Irene sitting in the swing. A

light, vaguely swaying, grey figure with a fleck of sunlight here and

there upon it, lips just opened, eyes dark and soft under lids a little

drooped. She looked content; surely it did her good to come and see him!

The selfishness of age had not set its proper grip on him, for he could

still feel pleasure in the pleasure of others, realising that what he

wanted, though much, was not quite all that mattered.

"It's quiet here," he said; "you mustn't come down if you find it dull.

But it's a pleasure to see you. My little sweet is the only face which

gives me any pleasure, except yours."

From her smile he knew that she was not beyond liking to be appreciated,

and this reassured him. "That's not humbug," he said. "I never told a

woman I admired her when I didn't. In fact I don't know when I've told

a woman I admired her, except my wife in the old days; and wives are

funny." He was silent, but resumed abruptly:

"She used to expect me to say it more often than I felt it, and there

we were." Her face looked mysteriously troubled, and, afraid that he had

said something painful, he hurried on: "When my little sweet marries, I

hope she'll find someone who knows what women feel. I shan't be here to

see it, but there's too much topsy-turvydom in marriage; I don't want

her to pitch up against that." And, aware that he had made bad worse, he

added: "That dog will scratch."

A silence followed. Of what was she thinking, this pretty creature whose

life was spoiled; who had done with love, and yet was made for love?

Some day when he was gone, perhaps, she would find another mate--not so

disorderly as that young fellow who had got himself run over. Ah! but

her husband?

"Does Soames never trouble you?" he asked.

She shook her head. Her face had closed up suddenly. For all her

softness there was something irreconcilable about her. And a glimpse of

light on the inexorable nature of sex antipathies strayed into a brain

which, belonging to early Victorian civilisation--so much older than

this of his old age--had never thought about such primitive things.

"That's a comfort," he said. "You can see the Grand Stand to-day. Shall

we take a turn round?"

Through the flower and fruit garden, against whose high outer walls

peach trees and nectarines were trained to the sun, through the stables,

the vinery, the mushroom house, the asparagus beds, the rosery, the

summer-house, he conducted her--even into the kitchen garden to see the

tiny green peas which Holly loved to scoop out of their pods with

her finger, and lick up from the palm of her little brown hand. Many

delightful things he showed her, while Holly and the dog Balthasar

danced ahead, or came to them at intervals for attention. It was one of

the happiest afternoons he had ever spent, but it tired him and he was

glad to sit down in the music room and let her give him tea. A special

little friend of Holly's had come in--a fair child with short hair like

a boy's. And the two sported in the distance, under the stairs, on the

stairs, and up in the gallery. Old Jolyon begged for Chopin. She played

studies, mazurkas, waltzes, till the two children, creeping near, stood

at the foot of the piano their dark and golden heads bent forward,

listening. Old Jolyon watched.

"Let's see you dance, you two!"

Shyly, with a false start, they began. Bobbing and circling, earnest,

not very adroit, they went past and past his chair to the strains of

that waltz. He watched them and the face of her who was playing turned

smiling towards those little dancers thinking:

'Sweetest picture I've seen for ages.'

A voice said:

"Hollee! Mais enfin--qu'est-ce que tu fais la--danser, le dimanche!

Viens, donc!"

But the children came close to old Jolyon, knowing that he would save

them, and gazed into a face which was decidedly 'caught out.'

"Better the day, better the deed, Mam'zelle. It's all my doing. Trot

along, chicks, and have your tea."

And, when they were gone, followed by the dog Balthasar, who took every

meal, he looked at Irene with a twinkle and said:

"Well, there we are! Aren't they sweet? Have you any little ones among

your pupils?"

"Yes, three--two of them darlings."

"Pretty?"

"Lovely!"

Old Jolyon sighed; he had an insatiable appetite for the very young. "My

little sweet," he said, "is devoted to music; she'll be a musician some

day. You wouldn't give me your opinion of her playing, I suppose?"

"Of course I will."

"You wouldn't like--" but he stifled the words "to give her lessons."

The idea that she gave lessons was unpleasant to him; yet it would mean

that he would see her regularly. She left the piano and came over to his

chair.

"I would like, very much; but there is--June. When are they coming

back?"

Old Jolyon frowned. "Not till the middle of next month. What does that

matter?"

"You said June had forgiven me; but she could never forget, Uncle

Jolyon."

Forget! She must forget, if he wanted her to.

But as if answering, Irene shook her head. "You know she couldn't; one

doesn't forget."

Always that wretched past! And he said with a sort of vexed finality:

"Well, we shall see."

He talked to her an hour or more, of the children, and a hundred little

things, till the carriage came round to take her home. And when she had

gone he went back to his chair, and sat there smoothing his face and

chin, dreaming over the day.

That evening after dinner he went to his study and took a sheet of

paper. He stayed for some minutes without writing, then rose and stood

under the masterpiece 'Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset.' He was not

thinking of that picture, but of his life. He was going to leave her

something in his Will; nothing could so have stirred the stilly deeps of

thought and memory. He was going to leave her a portion of his wealth,

of his aspirations, deeds, qualities, work--all that had made that

wealth; going to leave her, too, a part of all he had missed in life, by

his sane and steady pursuit of wealth. All! What had he missed? 'Dutch

Fishing Boats' responded blankly; he crossed to the French window, and

drawing the curtain aside, opened it. A wind had got up, and one of last

year's oak leaves which had somehow survived the gardener's brooms, was

dragging itself with a tiny clicking rustle along the stone terrace in

the twilight. Except for that it was very quiet out there, and he could

smell the heliotrope watered not long since. A bat went by. A bird

uttered its last 'cheep.' And right above the oak tree the first star

shone. Faust in the opera had bartered his soul for some fresh years

of youth. Morbid notion! No such bargain was possible, that was real

tragedy! No making oneself new again for love or life or anything.

Nothing left to do but enjoy beauty from afar off while you could, and

leave it something in your Will. But how much? And, as if he could not

make that calculation looking out into the mild freedom of the country

night, he turned back and went up to the chimney-piece. There were

his pet bronzes--a Cleopatra with the asp at her breast; a Socrates; a

greyhound playing with her puppy; a strong man reining in some horses.

'They last!' he thought, and a pang went through his heart. They had a

thousand years of life before them!

'How much?' Well! enough at all events to save her getting old before

her time, to keep the lines out of her face as long as possible, and

grey from soiling that bright hair. He might live another five years.

She would be well over thirty by then. 'How much?' She had none of his

blood in her! In loyalty to the tenor of his life for forty years and

more, ever since he married and founded that mysterious thing, a family,

came this warning thought--None of his blood, no right to anything! It

was a luxury then, this notion. An extravagance, a petting of an old

man's whim, one of those things done in dotage. His real future was

vested in those who had his blood, in whom he would live on when he

was gone. He turned away from the bronzes and stood looking at the old

leather chair in which he had sat and smoked so many hundreds of cigars.

And suddenly he seemed to see her sitting there in her grey dress,

fragrant, soft, dark-eyed, graceful, looking up at him. Why! She cared

nothing for him, really; all she cared for was that lost lover of hers.

But she was there, whether she would or no, giving him pleasure with her

beauty and grace. One had no right to inflict an old man's company, no

right to ask her down to play to him and let him look at her--for no

reward! Pleasure must be paid for in this world. 'How much?' After all,

there was plenty; his son and his three grandchildren would never miss

that little lump. He had made it himself, nearly every penny; he could

leave it where he liked, allow himself this little pleasure. He went

back to the bureau. 'Well, I'm going to,' he thought, 'let them think

what they like. I'm going to!' And he sat down.

'How much?' Ten thousand, twenty thousand--how much? If only with his

money he could buy one year, one month of youth. And startled by that

thought, he wrote quickly:

'DEAR HERRING,--Draw me a codicil to this effect: "I leave to my niece

Irene Forsyte, born Irene Heron, by which name she now goes, fifteen

thousand pounds free of legacy duty." 'Yours faithfully, 'JOLYON

FORSYTE.'

When he had sealed and stamped the envelope, he went back to the window

and drew in a long breath. It was dark, but many stars shone now.

IV

He woke at half-past two, an hour which long experience had taught him

brings panic intensity to all awkward thoughts. Experience had also

taught him that a further waking at the proper hour of eight showed

the folly of such panic. On this particular morning the thought which

gathered rapid momentum was that if he became ill, at his age not

improbable, he would not see her. From this it was but a step to

realisation that he would be cut off, too, when his son and June

returned from Spain. How could he justify desire for the company of one

who had stolen--early morning does not mince words--June's lover? That

lover was dead; but June was a stubborn little thing; warm-hearted, but

stubborn as wood, and--quite true--not one who forgot! By the middle of

next month they would be back. He had barely five weeks left to enjoy

the new interest which had come into what remained of his life. Darkness

showed up to him absurdly clear the nature of his feeling. Admiration

for beauty--a craving to see that which delighted his eyes.

Preposterous, at his age! And yet--what other reason was there for

asking June to undergo such painful reminder, and how prevent his son

and his son's wife from thinking him very queer? He would be reduced

to sneaking up to London, which tired him; and the least indisposition

would cut him off even from that. He lay with eyes open, setting his jaw

against the prospect, and calling himself an old fool, while his heart

beat loudly, and then seemed to stop beating altogether. He had seen the

dawn lighting the window chinks, heard the birds chirp and twitter, and

the cocks crow, before he fell asleep again, and awoke tired but sane.

Five weeks before he need bother, at his age an eternity! But that early

morning panic had left its mark, had slightly fevered the will of one

who had always had his own way. He would see her as often as he wished!

Why not go up to town and make that codicil at his solicitor's instead

of writing about it; she might like to go to the opera! But, by train,

for he would not have that fat chap Beacon grinning behind his back.

Servants were such fools; and, as likely as not, they had known all the

past history of Irene and young Bosinney--servants knew everything, and

suspected the rest. He wrote to her that morning:

"MY DEAR IRENE,--I have to be up in town to-morrow. If you would like to

have a look in at the opera, come and dine with me quietly ...."

But where? It was decades since he had dined anywhere in London save

at his Club or at a private house. Ah! that new-fangled place close to

Covent Garden....

"Let me have a line to-morrow morning to the Piedmont Hotel whether to

expect you there at 7 o'clock.

"Yours affectionately,

"JOLYON FORSYTE."

She would understand that he just wanted to give her a little pleasure;

for the idea that she should guess he had this itch to see her was

instinctively unpleasant to him; it was not seemly that one so old

should go out of his way to see beauty, especially in a woman.

The journey next day, short though it was, and the visit to his

lawyer's, tired him. It was hot too, and after dressing for dinner he

lay down on the sofa in his bedroom to rest a little. He must have had

a sort of fainting fit, for he came to himself feeling very queer; and

with some difficulty rose and rang the bell. Why! it was past seven! And

there he was and she would be waiting. But suddenly the dizziness came

on again, and he was obliged to relapse on the sofa. He heard the maid's

voice say:

"Did you ring, sir?"

"Yes, come here"; he could not see her clearly, for the cloud in front

of his eyes. "I'm not well, I want some sal volatile."

"Yes, sir." Her voice sounded frightened.

Old Jolyon made an effort.

"Don't go. Take this message to my niece--a lady waiting in the hall--a

lady in grey. Say Mr. Forsyte is not well--the heat. He is very sorry;

if he is not down directly, she is not to wait dinner."

When she was gone, he thought feebly: 'Why did I say a lady in grey--she

may be in anything. Sal volatile!' He did not go off again, yet was not

conscious of how Irene came to be standing beside him, holding smelling

salts to his nose, and pushing a pillow up behind his head. He heard her

say anxiously: "Dear Uncle Jolyon, what is it?" was dimly conscious of

the soft pressure of her lips on his hand; then drew a long breath of

smelling salts, suddenly discovered strength in them, and sneezed.

"Ha!" he said, "it's nothing. How did you get here? Go down and

dine--the tickets are on the dressing-table. I shall be all right in a

minute."

He felt her cool hand on his forehead, smelled violets, and sat divided

between a sort of pleasure and a determination to be all right.

"Why! You are in grey!" he said. "Help me up." Once on his feet he gave

himself a shake.

"What business had I to go off like that!" And he moved very slowly to

the glass. What a cadaverous chap! Her voice, behind him, murmured:

"You mustn't come down, Uncle; you must rest."

"Fiddlesticks! A glass of champagne'll soon set me to rights. I can't

have you missing the opera."

But the journey down the corridor was troublesome. What carpets they

had in these newfangled places, so thick that you tripped up in them at

every step! In the lift he noticed how concerned she looked, and said

with the ghost of a twinkle:

"I'm a pretty host."

When the lift stopped he had to hold firmly to the seat to prevent its

slipping under him; but after soup and a glass of champagne he felt

much better, and began to enjoy an infirmity which had brought such

solicitude into her manner towards him.

"I should have liked you for a daughter," he said suddenly; and watching

the smile in her eyes, went on:

"You mustn't get wrapped up in the past at your time of life; plenty of

that when you get to my age. That's a nice dress--I like the style."

"I made it myself."

Ah! A woman who could make herself a pretty frock had not lost her

interest in life.

"Make hay while the sun shines," he said; "and drink that up. I want to

see some colour in your cheeks. We mustn't waste life; it doesn't do.

There's a new Marguerite to-night; let's hope she won't be fat. And

Mephisto--anything more dreadful than a fat chap playing the Devil I

can't imagine."

But they did not go to the opera after all, for in getting up from

dinner the dizziness came over him again, and she insisted on his

staying quiet and going to bed early. When he parted from her at the

door of the hotel, having paid the cabman to drive her to Chelsea, he

sat down again for a moment to enjoy the memory of her words: "You are

such a darling to me, Uncle Jolyon!" Why! Who wouldn't be! He would

have liked to stay up another day and take her to the Zoo, but two

days running of him would bore her to death. No, he must wait till next

Sunday; she had promised to come then. They would settle those lessons

for Holly, if only for a month. It would be something. That little

Mam'zelle Beauce wouldn't like it, but she would have to lump it. And

crushing his old opera hat against his chest he sought the lift.

He drove to Waterloo next morning, struggling with a desire to say:

'Drive me to Chelsea.' But his sense of proportion was too strong.

Besides, he still felt shaky, and did not want to risk another

aberration like that of last night, away from home. Holly, too, was

expecting him, and what he had in his bag for her. Not that there was

any cupboard love in his little sweet--she was a bundle of affection.

Then, with the rather bitter cynicism of the old, he wondered for a

second whether it was not cupboard love which made Irene put up with

him. No, she was not that sort either. She had, if anything, too little

notion of how to butter her bread, no sense of property, poor thing!

Besides, he had not breathed a word about that codicil, nor should

he--sufficient unto the day was the good thereof.

In the victoria which met him at the station Holly was restraining the

dog Balthasar, and their caresses made 'jubey' his drive home. All

the rest of that fine hot day and most of the next he was content and

peaceful, reposing in the shade, while the long lingering sunshine

showered gold on the lawns and the flowers. But on Thursday evening at

his lonely dinner he began to count the hours; sixty-five till he would

go down to meet her again in the little coppice, and walk up through

the fields at her side. He had intended to consult the doctor about

his fainting fit, but the fellow would be sure to insist on quiet, no

excitement and all that; and he did not mean to be tied by the leg, did

not want to be told of an infirmity--if there were one, could not afford

to hear of it at his time of life, now that this new interest had come.

And he carefully avoided making any mention of it in a letter to his

son. It would only bring them back with a run! How far this silence was

due to consideration for their pleasure, how far to regard for his own,

he did not pause to consider.

That night in his study he had just finished his cigar and was dozing

off, when he heard the rustle of a gown, and was conscious of a scent of

violets. Opening his eyes he saw her, dressed in grey, standing by the

fireplace, holding out her arms. The odd thing was that, though those

arms seemed to hold nothing, they were curved as if round someone's

neck, and her own neck was bent back, her lips open, her eyes closed.

She vanished at once, and there were the mantelpiece and his bronzes.

But those bronzes and the mantelpiece had not been there when she was,

only the fireplace and the wall! Shaken and troubled, he got up. 'I must

take medicine,' he thought; 'I can't be well.' His heart beat too fast,

he had an asthmatic feeling in the chest; and going to the window, he

opened it to get some air. A dog was barking far away, one of the dogs

at Gage's farm no doubt, beyond the coppice. A beautiful still night,

but dark. 'I dropped off,' he mused, 'that's it! And yet I'll swear my

eyes were open!' A sound like a sigh seemed to answer.

"What's that?" he said sharply, "who's there?"

Putting his hand to his side to still the beating of his heart, he

stepped out on the terrace. Something soft scurried by in the dark.

"Shoo!" It was that great grey cat. 'Young Bosinney was like a great

cat!' he thought. 'It was him in there, that she--that she was--He's got

her still!' He walked to the edge of the terrace, and looked down into

the darkness; he could just see the powdering of the daisies on the

unmown lawn. Here to-day and gone to-morrow! And there came the moon,

who saw all, young and old, alive and dead, and didn't care a dump! His

own turn soon. For a single day of youth he would give what was left!

And he turned again towards the house. He could see the windows of the

night nursery up there. His little sweet would be asleep. 'Hope that

dog won't wake her!' he thought. 'What is it makes us love, and makes us

die! I must go to bed.'

And across the terrace stones, growing grey in the moonlight, he passed

back within.

How should an old man live his days if not in dreaming of his well-spent

past? In that, at all events, there is no agitating warmth, only pale

winter sunshine. The shell can withstand the gentle beating of the

dynamos of memory. The present he should distrust; the future shun. From

beneath thick shade he should watch the sunlight creeping at his toes.

If there be sun of summer, let him not go out into it, mistaking it

for the Indian-summer sun! Thus peradventure he shall decline softly,

slowly, imperceptibly, until impatient Nature clutches his wind-pipe and

he gasps away to death some early morning before the world is aired,

and they put on his tombstone: 'In the fulness of years!' yea! If he

preserve his principles in perfect order, a Forsyte may live on long

after he is dead.

Old Jolyon was conscious of all this, and yet there was in him that

which transcended Forsyteism. For it is written that a Forsyte shall not

love beauty more than reason; nor his own way more than his own health.

And something beat within him in these days that with each throb fretted

at the thinning shell. His sagacity knew this, but it knew too that he

could not stop that beating, nor would if he could. And yet, if you had

told him he was living on his capital, he would have stared you

down. No, no; a man did not live on his capital; it was not done! The

shibboleths of the past are ever more real than the actualities of

the present. And he, to whom living on one's capital had always been

anathema, could not have borne to have applied so gross a phrase to his

own case. Pleasure is healthful; beauty good to see; to live again in

the youth of the young--and what else on earth was he doing!

Methodically, as had been the way of his whole life, he now arranged his

time. On Tuesdays he journeyed up to town by train; Irene came and dined

with him. And they went to the opera. On Thursdays he drove to town,

and, putting that fat chap and his horses up, met her in Kensington

Gardens, picking up the carriage after he had left her, and driving home

again in time for dinner. He threw out the casual formula that he had

business in London on those two days. On Wednesdays and Saturdays she

came down to give Holly music lessons. The greater the pleasure he

took in her society, the more scrupulously fastidious he became, just a

matter-of-fact and friendly uncle. Not even in feeling, really, was he

more--for, after all, there was his age. And yet, if she were late he

fidgeted himself to death. If she missed coming, which happened twice,

his eyes grew sad as an old dog's, and he failed to sleep.

And so a month went by--a month of summer in the fields, and in his

heart, with summer's heat and the fatigue thereof. Who could have

believed a few weeks back that he would have looked forward to his son's

and his grand-daughter's return with something like dread! There was

such a delicious freedom, such recovery of that independence a man

enjoys before he founds a family, about these weeks of lovely weather,

and this new companionship with one who demanded nothing, and remained

always a little unknown, retaining the fascination of mystery. It was

like a draught of wine to him who has been drinking water for so long

that he has almost forgotten the stir wine brings to his blood, the

narcotic to his brain. The flowers were coloured brighter, scents and

music and the sunlight had a living value--were no longer mere reminders

of past enjoyment. There was something now to live for which stirred him

continually to anticipation. He lived in that, not in retrospection;

the difference is considerable to any so old as he. The pleasures of the

table, never of much consequence to one naturally abstemious, had lost

all value. He ate little, without knowing what he ate; and every day

grew thinner and more worn to look at. He was again a 'threadpaper'; and

to this thinned form his massive forehead, with hollows at the temples,

gave more dignity than ever. He was very well aware that he ought to see

the doctor, but liberty was too sweet. He could not afford to pet his

frequent shortness of breath and the pain in his side at the expense

of liberty. Return to the vegetable existence he had led among the

agricultural journals with the life-size mangold wurzels, before this

new attraction came into his life--no! He exceeded his allowance of

cigars. Two a day had always been his rule. Now he smoked three and

sometimes four--a man will when he is filled with the creative spirit.

But very often he thought: 'I must give up smoking, and coffee; I must

give up rattling up to town.' But he did not; there was no one in any

sort of authority to notice him, and this was a priceless boon.

The servants perhaps wondered, but they were, naturally, dumb. Mam'zelle

Beauce was too concerned with her own digestion, and too 'wellbrrred'

to make personal allusions. Holly had not as yet an eye for the relative

appearance of him who was her plaything and her god. It was left for

Irene herself to beg him to eat more, to rest in the hot part of the

day, to take a tonic, and so forth. But she did not tell him that she

was the cause of his thinness--for one cannot see the havoc oneself

is working. A man of eighty-five has no passions, but the Beauty which

produces passion works on in the old way, till death closes the eyes

which crave the sight of Her.

On the first day of the second week in July he received a letter from

his son in Paris to say that they would all be back on Friday. This had

always been more sure than Fate; but, with the pathetic improvidence

given to the old, that they may endure to the end, he had never quite

admitted it. Now he did, and something would have to be done. He had

ceased to be able to imagine life without this new interest, but that

which is not imagined sometimes exists, as Forsytes are perpetually

finding to their cost. He sat in his old leather chair, doubling up the

letter, and mumbling with his lips the end of an unlighted cigar. After

to-morrow his Tuesday expeditions to town would have to be abandoned. He

could still drive up, perhaps, once a week, on the pretext of seeing his

man of business. But even that would be dependent on his health, for now

they would begin to fuss about him. The lessons! The lessons must go on!

She must swallow down her scruples, and June must put her feelings

in her pocket. She had done so once, on the day after the news of

Bosinney's death; what she had done then, she could surely do again now.

Four years since that injury was inflicted on her--not Christian to

keep the memory of old sores alive. June's will was strong, but his was

stronger, for his sands were running out. Irene was soft, surely she

would do this for him, subdue her natural shrinking, sooner than give

him pain! The lessons must continue; for if they did, he was secure. And

lighting his cigar at last, he began trying to shape out how to put it

to them all, and explain this strange intimacy; how to veil and wrap it

away from the naked truth--that he could not bear to be deprived of

the sight of beauty. Ah! Holly! Holly was fond of her, Holly liked

her lessons. She would save him--his little sweet! And with that happy

thought he became serene, and wondered what he had been worrying about

so fearfully. He must not worry, it left him always curiously weak, and

as if but half present in his own body.

That evening after dinner he had a return of the dizziness, though he

did not faint. He would not ring the bell, because he knew it would mean

a fuss, and make his going up on the morrow more conspicuous. When one

grew old, the whole world was in conspiracy to limit freedom, and for

what reason?--just to keep the breath in him a little longer. He did

not want it at such cost. Only the dog Balthasar saw his lonely recovery

from that weakness; anxiously watched his master go to the sideboard

and drink some brandy, instead of giving him a biscuit. When at last

old Jolyon felt able to tackle the stairs he went up to bed. And, though

still shaky next morning, the thought of the evening sustained and

strengthened him. It was always such a pleasure to give her a good

dinner--he suspected her of undereating when she was alone; and, at the

opera to watch her eyes glow and brighten, the unconscious smiling of

her lips. She hadn't much pleasure, and this was the last time he would

be able to give her that treat. But when he was packing his bag he

caught himself wishing that he had not the fatigue of dressing for

dinner before him, and the exertion, too, of telling her about June's

return.

The opera that evening was 'Carmen,' and he chose the last entr'acte to

break the news, instinctively putting it off till the latest moment.

She took it quietly, queerly; in fact, he did not know how she had

taken it before the wayward music lifted up again and silence became

necessary. The mask was down over her face, that mask behind which so

much went on that he could not see. She wanted time to think it over,

no doubt! He would not press her, for she would be coming to give her

lesson to-morrow afternoon, and he should see her then when she had got

used to the idea. In the cab he talked only of the Carmen; he had seen

better in the old days, but this one was not bad at all. When he took

her hand to say good-night, she bent quickly forward and kissed his

forehead.

"Good-bye, dear Uncle Jolyon, you have been so sweet to me."

"To-morrow then," he said. "Good-night. Sleep well." She echoed softly:

"Sleep well" and from the cab window, already moving away, he saw her

face screwed round towards him, and her hand put out in a gesture which

seemed to linger.

He sought his room slowly. They never gave him the same, and he could

not get used to these 'spick-and-spandy' bedrooms with new furniture and

grey-green carpets sprinkled all over with pink roses. He was wakeful

and that wretched Habanera kept throbbing in his head.

His French had never been equal to its words, but its sense he knew, if

it had any sense, a gipsy thing--wild and unaccountable. Well, there was

in life something which upset all your care and plans--something which

made men and women dance to its pipes. And he lay staring from deep-sunk

eyes into the darkness where the unaccountable held sway. You thought

you had hold of life, but it slipped away behind you, took you by the

scruff of the neck, forced you here and forced you there, and then,

likely as not, squeezed life out of you! It took the very stars like

that, he shouldn't wonder, rubbed their noses together and flung them

apart; it had never done playing its pranks. Five million people in

this great blunderbuss of a town, and all of them at the mercy of that

Life-Force, like a lot of little dried peas hopping about on a board

when you struck your fist on it. Ah, well! Himself would not hop much

longer--a good long sleep would do him good!

How hot it was up here!--how noisy! His forehead burned; she had kissed

it just where he always worried; just there--as if she had known the

very place and wanted to kiss it all away for him. But, instead, her

lips left a patch of grievous uneasiness. She had never spoken in quite

that voice, had never before made that lingering gesture or looked back

at him as she drove away.

He got out of bed and pulled the curtains aside; his room faced down

over the river. There was little air, but the sight of that breadth

of water flowing by, calm, eternal, soothed him. 'The great thing,'

he thought 'is not to make myself a nuisance. I'll think of my little

sweet, and go to sleep.' But it was long before the heat and throbbing

of the London night died out into the short slumber of the summer

morning. And old Jolyon had but forty winks.

When he reached home next day he went out to the flower garden, and with

the help of Holly, who was very delicate with flowers, gathered a great

bunch of carnations. They were, he told her, for 'the lady in grey'--a

name still bandied between them; and he put them in a bowl in his study

where he meant to tackle Irene the moment she came, on the subject of

June and future lessons. Their fragrance and colour would help. After

lunch he lay down, for he felt very tired, and the carriage would not

bring her from the station till four o'clock. But as the hour approached

he grew restless, and sought the schoolroom, which overlooked the drive.

The sun-blinds were down, and Holly was there with Mademoiselle Beauce,

sheltered from the heat of a stifling July day, attending to their

silkworms. Old Jolyon had a natural antipathy to these methodical

creatures, whose heads and colour reminded him of elephants; who nibbled

such quantities of holes in nice green leaves; and smelled, as he

thought, horrid. He sat down on a chintz-covered windowseat whence he

could see the drive, and get what air there was; and the dog Balthasar

who appreciated chintz on hot days, jumped up beside him. Over the

cottage piano a violet dust-sheet, faded almost to grey, was spread, and

on it the first lavender, whose scent filled the room. In spite of

the coolness here, perhaps because of that coolness the beat of life

vehemently impressed his ebbed-down senses. Each sunbeam which came

through the chinks had annoying brilliance; that dog smelled very

strong; the lavender perfume was overpowering; those silkworms heaving

up their grey-green backs seemed horribly alive; and Holly's dark head

bent over them had a wonderfully silky sheen. A marvellous cruelly

strong thing was life when you were old and weak; it seemed to mock you

with its multitude of forms and its beating vitality. He had never, till

those last few weeks, had this curious feeling of being with one half of

him eagerly borne along in the stream of life, and with the other half

left on the bank, watching that helpless progress. Only when Irene was

with him did he lose this double consciousness.

Holly turned her head, pointed with her little brown fist to the

piano--for to point with a finger was not 'well-brrred'--and said slyly:

"Look at the 'lady in grey,' Gran; isn't she pretty to-day?"

Old Jolyon's heart gave a flutter, and for a second the room was

clouded; then it cleared, and he said with a twinkle:

"Who's been dressing her up?"

"Mam'zelle."

"Hollee! Don't be foolish!"

That prim little Frenchwoman! She hadn't yet got over the music lessons

being taken away from her. That wouldn't help. His little sweet was

the only friend they had. Well, they were her lessons. And he shouldn't

budge shouldn't budge for anything. He stroked the warm wool on

Balthasar's head, and heard Holly say: "When mother's home, there won't

be any changes, will there? She doesn't like strangers, you know."

The child's words seemed to bring the chilly atmosphere of opposition

about old Jolyon, and disclose all the menace to his new-found freedom.

Ah! He would have to resign himself to being an old man at the mercy of

care and love, or fight to keep this new and prized companionship;

and to fight tired him to death. But his thin, worn face hardened into

resolution till it appeared all Jaw. This was his house, and his affair;

he should not budge! He looked at his watch, old and thin like himself;

he had owned it fifty years. Past four already! And kissing the top of

Holly's head in passing, he went down to the hall. He wanted to get

hold of her before she went up to give her lesson. At the first sound of

wheels he stepped out into the porch, and saw at once that the victoria

was empty.

"The train's in, sir; but the lady 'asn't come."

Old Jolyon gave him a sharp upward look, his eyes seemed to push away

that fat chap's curiosity, and defy him to see the bitter disappointment

he was feeling.

"Very well," he said, and turned back into the house. He went to his

study and sat down, quivering like a leaf. What did this mean? She might

have lost her train, but he knew well enough she hadn't. 'Good-bye, dear

Uncle Jolyon.' Why 'Good-bye' and not 'Good-night'? And that hand of

hers lingering in the air. And her kiss. What did it mean? Vehement

alarm and irritation took possession of him. He got up and began to pace

the Turkey carpet, between window and wall. She was going to give him

up! He felt it for certain--and he defenceless. An old man wanting to

look on beauty! It was ridiculous! Age closed his mouth, paralysed his

power to fight. He had no right to what was warm and living, no right to

anything but memories and sorrow. He could not plead with her; even

an old man has his dignity. Defenceless! For an hour, lost to bodily

fatigue, he paced up and down, past the bowl of carnations he had

plucked, which mocked him with its scent. Of all things hard to bear,

the prostration of will-power is hardest, for one who has always had his

way. Nature had got him in its net, and like an unhappy fish he turned

and swam at the meshes, here and there, found no hole, no breaking

point. They brought him tea at five o'clock, and a letter. For a moment

hope beat up in him. He cut the envelope with the butter knife, and

read:

"DEAREST UNCLE JOLYON,--I can't bear to write anything that may

disappoint you, but I was too cowardly to tell you last night. I feel I

can't come down and give Holly any more lessons, now that June is coming

back. Some things go too deep to be forgotten. It has been such a joy to

see you and Holly. Perhaps I shall still see you sometimes when you

come up, though I'm sure it's not good for you; I can see you are tiring

yourself too much. I believe you ought to rest quite quietly all this

hot weather, and now you have your son and June coming back you will be

so happy. Thank you a million times for all your sweetness to me.

"Lovingly your IRENE."

So, there it was! Not good for him to have pleasure and what he chiefly

cared about; to try and put off feeling the inevitable end of all

things, the approach of death with its stealthy, rustling footsteps.

Not good for him! Not even she could see how she was his new lease of

interest in life, the incarnation of all the beauty he felt slipping

from him.

His tea grew cold, his cigar remained unlit; and up and down he paced,

torn between his dignity and his hold on life. Intolerable to be

squeezed out slowly, without a say of your own, to live on when your

will was in the hands of others bent on weighing you to the ground with

care and love. Intolerable! He would see what telling her the truth

would do--the truth that he wanted the sight of her more than just a

lingering on. He sat down at his old bureau and took a pen. But he could

not write. There was something revolting in having to plead like this;

plead that she should warm his eyes with her beauty. It was tantamount

to confessing dotage. He simply could not. And instead, he wrote:

"I had hoped that the memory of old sores would not be allowed to

stand in the way of what is a pleasure and a profit to me and my little

grand-daughter. But old men learn to forego their whims; they are

obliged to, even the whim to live must be foregone sooner or later; and

perhaps the sooner the better.

"My love to you,

"JOLYON FORSYTE."

'Bitter,' he thought, 'but I can't help it. I'm tired.' He sealed and

dropped it into the box for the evening post, and hearing it fall to the

bottom, thought: 'There goes all I've looked forward to!'

That evening after dinner which he scarcely touched, after his cigar

which he left half-smoked for it made him feel faint, he went very

slowly upstairs and stole into the night-nursery. He sat down on the

window-seat. A night-light was burning, and he could just see Holly's

face, with one hand underneath the cheek. An early cockchafer buzzed in

the Japanese paper with which they had filled the grate, and one of the

horses in the stable stamped restlessly. To sleep like that child! He

pressed apart two rungs of the venetian blind and looked out. The moon

was rising, blood-red. He had never seen so red a moon. The woods and

fields out there were dropping to sleep too, in the last glimmer of the

summer light. And beauty, like a spirit, walked. 'I've had a long life,'

he thought, 'the best of nearly everything. I'm an ungrateful chap; I've

seen a lot of beauty in my time. Poor young Bosinney said I had a sense

of beauty. There's a man in the moon to-night!' A moth went by, another,

another. 'Ladies in grey!' He closed his eyes. A feeling that he would

never open them again beset him; he let it grow, let himself sink; then,

with a shiver, dragged the lids up. There was something wrong with him,

no doubt, deeply wrong; he would have to have the doctor after all.

It didn't much matter now! Into that coppice the moon-light would have

crept; there would be shadows, and those shadows would be the only

things awake. No birds, beasts, flowers, insects; Just the shadows

--moving; 'Ladies in grey!' Over that log they would climb; would

whisper together. She and Bosinney! Funny thought! And the frogs and

little things would whisper too! How the clock ticked, in here! It was

all eerie--out there in the light of that red moon; in here with

the little steady night-light and, the ticking clock and the nurse's

dressing-gown hanging from the edge of the screen, tall, like a woman's

figure. 'Lady in grey!' And a very odd thought beset him: Did she exist?

Had she ever come at all? Or was she but the emanation of all the beauty

he had loved and must leave so soon? The violet-grey spirit with the

dark eyes and the crown of amber hair, who walks the dawn and the

moonlight, and at blue-bell time? What was she, who was she, did she

exist? He rose and stood a moment clutching the window-sill, to give

him a sense of reality again; then began tiptoeing towards the door. He

stopped at the foot of the bed; and Holly, as if conscious of his eyes

fixed on her, stirred, sighed, and curled up closer in defence. He

tiptoed on and passed out into the dark passage; reached his room,

undressed at once, and stood before a mirror in his night-shirt. What a

scarecrow--with temples fallen in, and thin legs! His eyes resisted his

own image, and a look of pride came on his face. All was in league

to pull him down, even his reflection in the glass, but he was not

down--yet! He got into bed, and lay a long time without sleeping,

trying to reach resignation, only too well aware that fretting and

disappointment were very bad for him.

He woke in the morning so unrefreshed and strengthless that he sent for

the doctor. After sounding him, the fellow pulled a face as long as your

arm, and ordered him to stay in bed and give up smoking. That was no

hardship; there was nothing to get up for, and when he felt ill,

tobacco always lost its savour. He spent the morning languidly with the

sun-blinds down, turning and re-turning The Times, not reading much, the

dog Balthasar lying beside his bed. With his lunch they brought him a

telegram, running thus:

'Your letter received coming down this afternoon will be with you at

four-thirty. Irene.'

Coming down! After all! Then she did exist--and he was not deserted.

Coming down! A glow ran through his limbs; his cheeks and forehead felt

hot. He drank his soup, and pushed the tray-table away, lying very quiet

until they had removed lunch and left him alone; but every now and then

his eyes twinkled. Coming down! His heart beat fast, and then did

not seem to beat at all. At three o'clock he got up and dressed

deliberately, noiselessly. Holly and Mam'zelle would be in the

schoolroom, and the servants asleep after their dinner, he shouldn't

wonder. He opened his door cautiously, and went downstairs. In the hall

the dog Balthasar lay solitary, and, followed by him, old Jolyon passed

into his study and out into the burning afternoon. He meant to go down

and meet her in the coppice, but felt at once he could not manage that

in this heat. He sat down instead under the oak tree by the swing, and

the dog Balthasar, who also felt the heat, lay down beside him. He sat

there smiling. What a revel of bright minutes! What a hum of insects,

and cooing of pigeons! It was the quintessence of a summer day. Lovely!

And he was happy--happy as a sand-boy, whatever that might be. She

was coming; she had not given him up! He had everything in life he

wanted--except a little more breath, and less weight--just here! He

would see her when she emerged from the fernery, come swaying just a

little, a violet-grey figure passing over the daisies and dandelions and

'soldiers' on the lawn--the soldiers with their flowery crowns. He would

not move, but she would come up to him and say: 'Dear Uncle Jolyon, I am

sorry!' and sit in the swing and let him look at her and tell her that

he had not been very well but was all right now; and that dog would lick

her hand. That dog knew his master was fond of her; that dog was a good

dog.

It was quite shady under the tree; the sun could not get at him, only

make the rest of the world bright so that he could see the Grand Stand

at Epsom away out there, very far, and the cows cropping the clover in

the field and swishing at the flies with their tails. He smelled the

scent of limes, and lavender. Ah! that was why there was such a racket

of bees. They were excited--busy, as his heart was busy and excited.

Drowsy, too, drowsy and drugged on honey and happiness; as his heart was

drugged and drowsy. Summer--summer--they seemed saying; great bees and

little bees, and the flies too!

The stable clock struck four; in half an hour she would be here. He

would have just one tiny nap, because he had had so little sleep of

late; and then he would be fresh for her, fresh for youth and beauty,

coming towards him across the sunlit lawn--lady in grey! And settling

back in his chair he closed his eyes. Some thistle-down came on what

little air there was, and pitched on his moustache more white than

itself. He did not know; but his breathing stirred it, caught there.

A ray of sunlight struck through and lodged on his boot. A bumble-bee

alighted and strolled on the crown of his Panama hat. And the delicious

surge of slumber reached the brain beneath that hat, and the head swayed

forward and rested on his breast. Summer--summer! So went the hum.

The stable clock struck the quarter past. The dog Balthasar stretched

and looked up at his master. The thistledown no longer moved. The dog

placed his chin over the sunlit foot. It did not stir. The dog withdrew

his chin quickly, rose, and leaped on old Jolyon's lap, looked in his

face, whined; then, leaping down, sat on his haunches, gazing up. And

suddenly he uttered a long, long howl.

But the thistledown was still as death, and the face of his old master.

Summer--summer--summer! The soundless footsteps on the grass! 1917

IN CHANCERY

Two households both alike in dignity,

From ancient grudge, break into new mutiny.

--Romeo and Juliet

TO JESSIE AND JOSEPH CONRAD

PART 1

CHAPTER I--AT TIMOTHY'S

The possessive instinct never stands still. Through florescence and

feud, frosts and fires, it followed the laws of progression even in

the Forsyte family which had believed it fixed for ever. Nor can it be

dissociated from environment any more than the quality of potato from

the soil.

The historian of the English eighties and nineties will, in his good

time, depict the somewhat rapid progression from self-contented and

contained provincialism to still more self-contented if less contained

imperialism--in other words, the 'possessive' instinct of the nation on

the move. And so, as if in conformity, was it with the Forsyte family.

They were spreading not merely on the surface, but within.

When, in 1895, Susan Hayman, the married Forsyte sister, followed her

husband at the ludicrously low age of seventy-four, and was cremated,

it made strangely little stir among the six old Forsytes left. For this

apathy there were three causes. First: the almost surreptitious burial

of old Jolyon in 1892 down at Robin Hill--first of the Forsytes to

desert the family grave at Highgate. That burial, coming a year after

Swithin's entirely proper funeral, had occasioned a great deal of talk

on Forsyte 'Change, the abode of Timothy Forsyte on the Bayswater Road,

London, which still collected and radiated family gossip. Opinions

ranged from the lamentation of Aunt Juley to the outspoken assertion of

Francie that it was 'a jolly good thing to stop all that stuffy Highgate

business.' Uncle Jolyon in his later years--indeed, ever since the

strange and lamentable affair between his granddaughter June's lover,

young Bosinney, and Irene, his nephew Soames Forsyte's wife--had

noticeably rapped the family's knuckles; and that way of his own which

he had always taken had begun to seem to them a little wayward. The

philosophic vein in him, of course, had always been too liable to crop

out of the strata of pure Forsyteism, so they were in a way prepared

for his interment in a strange spot. But the whole thing was an odd

business, and when the contents of his Will became current coin on

Forsyte 'Change, a shiver had gone round the clan. Out of his estate

(L145,304 gross, with liabilities L35 7s. 4d.) he had actually left

L15,000 to "whomever do you think, my dear? To Irene!" that runaway

wife of his nephew Soames; Irene, a woman who had almost disgraced the

family, and--still more amazing was to him no blood relation. Not out

and out, of course; only a life interest--only the income from it!

Still, there it was; and old Jolyon's claim to be the perfect Forsyte

was ended once for all. That, then, was the first reason why the burial

of Susan Hayman--at Woking--made little stir.

The second reason was altogether more expansive and imperial. Besides

the house on Campden Hill, Susan had a place (left her by Hayman when he

died) just over the border in Hants, where the Hayman boys had learned

to be such good shots and riders, as it was believed, which was of

course nice for them, and creditable to everybody; and the fact of

owning something really countrified seemed somehow to excuse the

dispersion of her remains--though what could have put cremation into

her head they could not think! The usual invitations, however, had been

issued, and Soames had gone down and young Nicholas, and the Will had

been quite satisfactory so far as it went, for she had only had a life

interest; and everything had gone quite smoothly to the children in

equal shares.

The third reason why Susan's burial made little stir was the most

expansive of all. It was summed up daringly by Euphemia, the pale, the

thin: "Well, I think people have a right to their own bodies, even when

they're dead." Coming from a daughter of Nicholas, a Liberal of the

old school and most tyrannical, it was a startling remark--showing in a

flash what a lot of water had run under bridges since the death of Aunt

Ann in '86, just when the proprietorship of Soames over his wife's body

was acquiring the uncertainty which had led to such disaster. Euphemia,

of course, spoke like a child, and had no experience; for though

well over thirty by now, her name was still Forsyte. But, making all

allowances, her remark did undoubtedly show expansion of the principle

of liberty, decentralisation and shift in the central point of

possession from others to oneself. When Nicholas heard his daughter's

remark from Aunt Hester he had rapped out: "Wives and daughters! There's

no end to their liberty in these days. I knew that 'Jackson' case would

lead to things--lugging in Habeas Corpus like that!" He had, of course,

never really forgiven the Married Woman's Property Act, which would so

have interfered with him if he had not mercifully married before it was

passed. But, in truth, there was no denying the revolt among the younger

Forsytes against being owned by others; that, as it were, Colonial

disposition to own oneself, which is the paradoxical forerunner of

Imperialism, was making progress all the time. They were all now

married, except George, confirmed to the Turf and the Iseeum Club;

Francie, pursuing her musical career in a studio off the King's Road,

Chelsea, and still taking 'lovers' to dances; Euphemia, living at home

and complaining of Nicholas; and those two Dromios, Giles and Jesse

Hayman. Of the third generation there were not very many--young Jolyon

had three, Winifred Dartie four, young Nicholas six already, young Roger

had one, Marian Tweetyman one; St. John Hayman two. But the rest of the

sixteen married--Soames, Rachel and Cicely of James' family; Eustace and

Thomas of Roger's; Ernest, Archibald and Florence of Nicholas';

Augustus and Annabel Spender of the Hayman's--were going down the years

unreproduced.

Thus, of the ten old Forsytes twenty-one young Forsytes had been born;

but of the twenty-one young Forsytes there were as yet only seventeen

descendants; and it already seemed unlikely that there would be more

than a further unconsidered trifle or so. A student of statistics must

have noticed that the birth rate had varied in accordance with the rate

of interest for your money. Grandfather 'Superior Dosset' Forsyte in the

early nineteenth century had been getting ten per cent. for his, hence

ten children. Those ten, leaving out the four who had not married, and

Juley, whose husband Septimus Small had, of course, died almost at

once, had averaged from four to five per cent. for theirs, and produced

accordingly. The twenty-one whom they produced were now getting barely

three per cent. in the Consols to which their father had mostly tied the

Settlements they made to avoid death duties, and the six of them who

had been reproduced had seventeen children, or just the proper two and

five-sixths per stem.

There were other reasons, too, for this mild reproduction. A distrust

of their earning powers, natural where a sufficiency is guaranteed,

together with the knowledge that their fathers did not die, kept them

cautious. If one had children and not much income, the standard of taste

and comfort must of necessity go down; what was enough for two was not

enough for four, and so on--it would be better to wait and see what

Father did. Besides, it was nice to be able to take holidays unhampered.

Sooner in fact than own children, they preferred to concentrate on

the ownership of themselves, conforming to the growing tendency fin

de siecle, as it was called. In this way, little risk was run, and one

would be able to have a motor-car. Indeed, Eustace already had one, but

it had shaken him horribly, and broken one of his eye teeth; so that it

would be better to wait till they were a little safer. In the meantime,

no more children! Even young Nicholas was drawing in his horns, and had

made no addition to his six for quite three years.

The corporate decay, however, of the Forsytes, their dispersion rather,

of which all this was symptomatic, had not advanced so far as to prevent

a rally when Roger Forsyte died in 1899. It had been a glorious summer,

and after holidays abroad and at the sea they were practically all back

in London, when Roger with a touch of his old originality had suddenly

breathed his last at his own house in Princes Gardens. At Timothy's it

was whispered sadly that poor Roger had always been eccentric about his

digestion--had he not, for instance, preferred German mutton to all the

other brands?

Be that as it may, his funeral at Highgate had been perfect, and coming

away from it Soames Forsyte made almost mechanically for his Uncle

Timothy's in the Bayswater Road. The 'Old Things'--Aunt Juley and Aunt

Hester--would like to hear about it. His father--James--at eighty-eight

had not felt up to the fatigue of the funeral; and Timothy himself,

of course, had not gone; so that Nicholas had been the only brother

present. Still, there had been a fair gathering; and it would cheer

Aunts Juley and Hester up to know. The kindly thought was not unmixed

with the inevitable longing to get something out of everything you do,

which is the chief characteristic of Forsytes, and indeed of the saner

elements in every nation. In this practice of taking family matters

to Timothy's in the Bayswater Road, Soames was but following in the

footsteps of his father, who had been in the habit of going at least

once a week to see his sisters at Timothy's, and had only given it

up when he lost his nerve at eighty-six, and could not go out without

Emily. To go with Emily was of no use, for who could really talk to

anyone in the presence of his own wife? Like James in the old days,

Soames found time to go there nearly every Sunday, and sit in the little

drawing-room into which, with his undoubted taste, he had introduced a

good deal of change and china not quite up to his own fastidious mark,

and at least two rather doubtful Barbizon pictures, at Christmastides.

He himself, who had done extremely well with the Barbizons, had for some

years past moved towards the Marises, Israels, and Mauve, and was

hoping to do better. In the riverside house which he now inhabited near

Mapledurham he had a gallery, beautifully hung and lighted, to which

few London dealers were strangers. It served, too, as a Sunday afternoon

attraction in those week-end parties which his sisters, Winifred or

Rachel, occasionally organised for him. For though he was but a taciturn

showman, his quiet collected determinism seldom failed to influence his

guests, who knew that his reputation was grounded not on mere aesthetic

fancy, but on his power of gauging the future of market values. When he

went to Timothy's he almost always had some little tale of triumph over

a dealer to unfold, and dearly he loved that coo of pride with which

his aunts would greet it. This afternoon, however, he was differently

animated, coming from Roger's funeral in his neat dark clothes--not

quite black, for after all an uncle was but an uncle, and his soul

abhorred excessive display of feeling. Leaning back in a marqueterie

chair and gazing down his uplifted nose at the sky-blue walls plastered

with gold frames, he was noticeably silent. Whether because he had been

to a funeral or not, the peculiar Forsyte build of his face was seen to

the best advantage this afternoon--a face concave and long, with a jaw

which divested of flesh would have seemed extravagant: altogether a

chinny face though not at all ill-looking. He was feeling more strongly

than ever that Timothy's was hopelessly 'rum-ti-too' and the souls of

his aunts dismally mid-Victorian. The subject on which alone he wanted

to talk--his own undivorced position--was unspeakable. And yet it

occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else. It was only since the

Spring that this had been so and a new feeling grown up which was

egging him on towards what he knew might well be folly in a Forsyte

of forty-five. More and more of late he had been conscious that he was

'getting on.' The fortune already considerable when he conceived the

house at Robin Hill which had finally wrecked his marriage with Irene,

had mounted with surprising vigour in the twelve lonely years during

which he had devoted himself to little else. He was worth to-day well

over a hundred thousand pounds, and had no one to leave it to--no real

object for going on with what was his religion. Even if he were to relax

his efforts, money made money, and he felt that he would have a hundred

and fifty thousand before he knew where he was. There had always been

a strongly domestic, philoprogenitive side to Soames; baulked and

frustrated, it had hidden itself away, but now had crept out again

in this his 'prime of life.' Concreted and focussed of late by the

attraction of a girl's undoubted beauty, it had become a veritable

prepossession.

And this girl was French, not likely to lose her head, or accept any

unlegalised position. Moreover, Soames himself disliked the thought of

that. He had tasted of the sordid side of sex during those long years

of forced celibacy, secretively, and always with disgust, for he was

fastidious, and his sense of law and order innate. He wanted no hole

and corner liaison. A marriage at the Embassy in Paris, a few months'

travel, and he could bring Annette back quite separated from a past

which in truth was not too distinguished, for she only kept the accounts

in her mother's Soho Restaurant; he could bring her back as something

very new and chic with her French taste and self-possession, to reign

at 'The Shelter' near Mapledurham. On Forsyte 'Change and among his

riverside friends it would be current that he had met a charming French

girl on his travels and married her. There would be the flavour of

romance, and a certain cachet about a French wife. No! He was not at

all afraid of that. It was only this cursed undivorced condition of his,

and--and the question whether Annette would take him, which he dared not

put to the touch until he had a clear and even dazzling future to offer

her.

In his aunts' drawing-room he heard with but muffled ears those usual

questions: How was his dear father? Not going out, of course, now that

the weather was turning chilly? Would Soames be sure to tell him that

Hester had found boiled holly leaves most comforting for that pain in

her side; a poultice every three hours, with red flannel afterwards. And

could he relish just a little pot of their very best prune preserve--it

was so delicious this year, and had such a wonderful effect. Oh! and

about the Darties--had Soames heard that dear Winifred was having a most

distressing time with Montague? Timothy thought she really ought to have

protection It was said--but Soames mustn't take this for certain--that

he had given some of Winifred's jewellery to a dreadful dancer. It was

such a bad example for dear Val just as he was going to college. Soames

had not heard? Oh, but he must go and see his sister and look into it at

once! And did he think these Boers were really going to resist? Timothy

was in quite a stew about it. The price of Consols was so high, and he

had such a lot of money in them. Did Soames think they must go down if

there was a war? Soames nodded. But it would be over very quickly. It

would be so bad for Timothy if it wasn't. And of course Soames' dear

father would feel it very much at his age. Luckily poor dear Roger

had been spared this dreadful anxiety. And Aunt Juley with a little

handkerchief wiped away the large tear trying to climb the permanent

pout on her now quite withered left cheek; she was remembering dear

Roger, and all his originality, and how he used to stick pins into

her when they were little together. Aunt Hester, with her instinct for

avoiding the unpleasant, here chimed in: Did Soames think they would

make Mr. Chamberlain Prime Minister at once? He would settle it all so

quickly. She would like to see that old Kruger sent to St. Helena. She

could remember so well the news of Napoleon's death, and what a relief

it had been to his grandfather. Of course she and Juley--"We were in

pantalettes then, my dear"--had not felt it much at the time.

Soames took a cup of tea from her, drank it quickly, and ate three

of those macaroons for which Timothy's was famous. His faint, pale,

supercilious smile had deepened just a little. Really, his family

remained hopelessly provincial, however much of London they might

possess between them. In these go-ahead days their provincialism stared

out even more than it used to. Why, old Nicholas was still a Free

Trader, and a member of that antediluvian home of Liberalism, the Remove

Club--though, to be sure, the members were pretty well all Conservatives

now, or he himself could not have joined; and Timothy, they said, still

wore a nightcap. Aunt Juley spoke again. Dear Soames was looking so

well, hardly a day older than he did when dear Ann died, and they were

all there together, dear Jolyon, and dear Swithin, and dear Roger.

She paused and caught the tear which had climbed the pout on her right

cheek. Did he--did he ever hear anything of Irene nowadays? Aunt

Hester visibly interposed her shoulder. Really, Juley was always saying

something! The smile left Soames' face, and he put his cup down. Here

was his subject broached for him, and for all his desire to expand, he

could not take advantage.

Aunt Juley went on rather hastily:

"They say dear Jolyon first left her that fifteen thousand out and out;

then of course he saw it would not be right, and made it for her life

only."

Had Soames heard that?

Soames nodded.

"Your cousin Jolyon is a widower now. He is her trustee; you knew that,

of course?"

Soames shook his head. He did know, but wished to show no interest.

Young Jolyon and he had not met since the day of Bosinney's death.

"He must be quite middle-aged by now," went on Aunt Juley dreamily. "Let

me see, he was born when your dear uncle lived in Mount Street; long

before they went to Stanhope Gate in December. Just before that dreadful

Commune. Over fifty! Fancy that! Such a pretty baby, and we were all so

proud of him; the very first of you all." Aunt Juley sighed, and a lock

of not quite her own hair came loose and straggled, so that Aunt Hester

gave a little shiver. Soames rose, he was experiencing a curious piece

of self-discovery. That old wound to his pride and self-esteem was not

yet closed. He had come thinking he could talk of it, even wanting to

talk of his fettered condition, and--behold! he was shrinking away from

this reminder by Aunt Juley, renowned for her Malapropisms.

Oh, Soames was not going already!

Soames smiled a little vindictively, and said:

"Yes. Good-bye. Remember me to Uncle Timothy!" And, leaving a cold kiss

on each forehead, whose wrinkles seemed to try and cling to his lips

as if longing to be kissed away, he left them looking brightly after

him--dear Soames, it had been so good of him to come to-day, when they

were not feeling very...!

With compunction tweaking at his chest Soames descended the stairs,

where was always that rather pleasant smell of camphor and port wine,

and house where draughts are not permitted. The poor old things--he

had not meant to be unkind! And in the street he instantly forgot them,

repossessed by the image of Annette and the thought of the cursed coil

around him. Why had he not pushed the thing through and obtained divorce

when that wretched Bosinney was run over, and there was evidence galore

for the asking! And he turned towards his sister Winifred Dartie's

residence in Green Street, Mayfair.

CHAPTER II--EXIT A MAN OF THE WORLD

That a man of the world so subject to the vicissitudes of fortunes

as Montague Dartie should still be living in a house he had inhabited

twenty years at least would have been more noticeable if the rent,

rates, taxes, and repairs of that house had not been defrayed by his

father-in-law. By that simple if wholesale device James Forsyte had

secured a certain stability in the lives of his daughter and his

grandchildren. After all, there is something invaluable about a safe

roof over the head of a sportsman so dashing as Dartie. Until the events

of the last few days he had been almost-supernaturally steady all this

year. The fact was he had acquired a half share in a filly of George

Forsyte's, who had gone irreparably on the turf, to the horror of Roger,

now stilled by the grave. Sleeve-links, by Martyr, out of Shirt-on-fire,

by Suspender, was a bay filly, three years old, who for a variety of

reasons had never shown her true form. With half ownership of this

hopeful animal, all the idealism latent somewhere in Dartie, as in every

other man, had put up its head, and kept him quietly ardent for months

past. When a man has some thing good to live for it is astonishing how

sober he becomes; and what Dartie had was really good--a three to one

chance for an autumn handicap, publicly assessed at twenty-five to one.

The old-fashioned heaven was a poor thing beside it, and his shirt

was on the daughter of Shirt-on-fire. But how much more than his shirt

depended on this granddaughter of Suspender! At that roving age of

forty-five, trying to Forsytes--and, though perhaps less distinguishable

from any other age, trying even to Darties--Montague had fixed his

current fancy on a dancer. It was no mean passion, but without money,

and a good deal of it, likely to remain a love as airy as her skirts;

and Dartie never had any money, subsisting miserably on what he could

beg or borrow from Winifred--a woman of character, who kept him because

he was the father of her children, and from a lingering admiration

for those now-dying Wardour Street good looks which in their youth

had fascinated her. She, together with anyone else who would lend him

anything, and his losses at cards and on the turf (extraordinary how

some men make a good thing out of losses!) were his whole means of

subsistence; for James was now too old and nervous to approach, and

Soames too formidably adamant. It is not too much to say that Dartie

had been living on hope for months. He had never been fond of money for

itself, had always despised the Forsytes with their investing habits,

though careful to make such use of them as he could. What he liked about

money was what it bought--personal sensation.

"No real sportsman cares for money," he would say, borrowing a 'pony' if

it was no use trying for a 'monkey.' There was something delicious about

Montague Dartie. He was, as George Forsyte said, a 'daisy.'

The morning of the Handicap dawned clear and bright, the last day of

September, and Dartie who had travelled to Newmarket the night before,

arrayed himself in spotless checks and walked to an eminence to see his

half of the filly take her final canter: If she won he would be a cool

three thou. in pocket--a poor enough recompense for the sobriety and

patience of these weeks of hope, while they had been nursing her for

this race. But he had not been able to afford more. Should he 'lay it

off' at the eight to one to which she had advanced? This was his single

thought while the larks sang above him, and the grassy downs smelled

sweet, and the pretty filly passed, tossing her head and glowing like

satin.

After all, if he lost it would not be he who paid, and to 'lay it off'

would reduce his winnings to some fifteen hundred--hardly enough to

purchase a dancer out and out. Even more potent was the itch in the

blood of all the Darties for a real flutter. And turning to George he

said: "She's a clipper. She'll win hands down; I shall go the whole

hog." George, who had laid off every penny, and a few besides, and stood

to win, however it came out, grinned down on him from his bulky

height, with the words: "So ho, my wild one!" for after a chequered

apprenticeship weathered with the money of a deeply complaining Roger,

his Forsyte blood was beginning to stand him in good stead in the

profession of owner.

There are moments of disillusionment in the lives of men from which the

sensitive recorder shrinks. Suffice it to say that the good thing fell

down. Sleeve-links finished in the ruck. Dartie's shirt was lost.

Between the passing of these things and the day when Soames turned his

face towards Green Street, what had not happened!

When a man with the constitution of Montague Dartie has exercised

self-control for months from religious motives, and remains unrewarded,

he does not curse God and die, he curses God and lives, to the distress

of his family.

Winifred--a plucky woman, if a little too fashionable--who had borne

the brunt of him for exactly twenty-one years, had never really believed

that he would do what he now did. Like so many wives, she thought she

knew the worst, but she had not yet known him in his forty-fifth year,

when he, like other men, felt that it was now or never. Paying on

the 2nd of October a visit of inspection to her jewel case, she was

horrified to observe that her woman's crown and glory was gone--the

pearls which Montague had given her in '86, when Benedict was born, and

which James had been compelled to pay for in the spring of '87, to save

scandal. She consulted her husband at once. He 'pooh-poohed' the matter.

They would turn up! Nor till she said sharply: "Very well, then, Monty,

I shall go down to Scotland Yard myself," did he consent to take the

matter in hand. Alas! that the steady and resolved continuity of design

necessary to the accomplishment of sweeping operations should be liable

to interruption by drink. That night Dartie returned home without a

care in the world or a particle of reticence. Under normal conditions

Winifred would merely have locked her door and let him sleep it off, but

torturing suspense about her pearls had caused her to wait up for him.

Taking a small revolver from his pocket and holding on to the dining

table, he told her at once that he did not care a cursh whether she

lived s'long as she was quiet; but he himself wash tired o' life.

Winifred, holding onto the other side of the dining table, answered:

"Don't be a clown, Monty. Have you been to Scotland Yard?"

Placing the revolver against his chest, Dartie had pulled the trigger

several times. It was not loaded. Dropping it with an imprecation,

he had muttered: "For shake o' the children," and sank into a chair.

Winifred, having picked up the revolver, gave him some soda water. The

liquor had a magical effect. Life had illused him; Winifred had never

'unshtood'm.' If he hadn't the right to take the pearls he had given

her himself, who had? That Spanish filly had got'm. If Winifred had

any 'jection he w'd cut--her--throat. What was the matter with that?

(Probably the first use of that celebrated phrase--so obscure are the

origins of even the most classical language!)

Winifred, who had learned self-containment in a hard school, looked up

at him, and said: "Spanish filly! Do you mean that girl we saw dancing

in the Pandemonium Ballet? Well, you are a thief and a blackguard." It

had been the last straw on a sorely loaded consciousness; reaching

up from his chair Dartie seized his wife's arm, and recalling the

achievements of his boyhood, twisted it. Winifred endured the agony with

tears in her eyes, but no murmur. Watching for a moment of weakness,

she wrenched it free; then placing the dining table between them,

said between her teeth: "You are the limit, Monty." (Undoubtedly the

inception of that phrase--so is English formed under the stress of

circumstances.) Leaving Dartie with foam on his dark moustache she went

upstairs, and, after locking her door and bathing her arm in hot

water, lay awake all night, thinking of her pearls adorning the neck of

another, and of the consideration her husband had presumably received

therefor.

The man of the world awoke with a sense of being lost to that world, and

a dim recollection of having been called a 'limit.' He sat for half

an hour in the dawn and the armchair where he had slept--perhaps the

unhappiest half-hour he had ever spent, for even to a Dartie there is

something tragic about an end. And he knew that he had reached it.

Never again would he sleep in his dining-room and wake with the light

filtering through those curtains bought by Winifred at Nickens and

Jarveys with the money of James. Never again eat a devilled kidney at

that rose-wood table, after a roll in the sheets and a hot bath. He took

his note case from his dress coat pocket. Four hundred pounds, in fives

and tens--the remainder of the proceeds of his half of Sleeve-links,

sold last night, cash down, to George Forsyte, who, having won over

the race, had not conceived the sudden dislike to the animal which he

himself now felt. The ballet was going to Buenos Aires the day after

to-morrow, and he was going too. Full value for the pearls had not yet

been received; he was only at the soup.

He stole upstairs. Not daring to have a bath, or shave (besides, the

water would be cold), he changed his clothes and packed stealthily

all he could. It was hard to leave so many shining boots, but one must

sacrifice something. Then, carrying a valise in either hand, he stepped

out onto the landing. The house was very quiet--that house where he had

begotten his four children. It was a curious moment, this, outside the

room of his wife, once admired, if not perhaps loved, who had called him

'the limit.' He steeled himself with that phrase, and tiptoed on; but

the next door was harder to pass. It was the room his daughters slept

in. Maud was at school, but Imogen would be lying there; and moisture

came into Dartie's early morning eyes. She was the most like him of the

four, with her dark hair, and her luscious brown glance. Just coming

out, a pretty thing! He set down the two valises. This almost formal

abdication of fatherhood hurt him. The morning light fell on a face

which worked with real emotion. Nothing so false as penitence moved him;

but genuine paternal feeling, and that melancholy of 'never again.' He

moistened his lips; and complete irresolution for a moment paralysed his

legs in their check trousers. It was hard--hard to be thus compelled to

leave his home! "D---nit!" he muttered, "I never thought it would come

to this." Noises above warned him that the maids were beginning to get

up. And grasping the two valises, he tiptoed on downstairs. His cheeks

were wet, and the knowledge of that was comforting, as though it

guaranteed the genuineness of his sacrifice. He lingered a little in the

rooms below, to pack all the cigars he had, some papers, a crush hat,

a silver cigarette box, a Ruff's Guide. Then, mixing himself a stiff

whisky and soda, and lighting a cigarette, he stood hesitating before a

photograph of his two girls, in a silver frame. It belonged to Winifred.

'Never mind,' he thought; 'she can get another taken, and I can't!' He

slipped it into the valise. Then, putting on his hat and overcoat, he

took two others, his best malacca cane, an umbrella, and opened the

front door. Closing it softly behind him, he walked out, burdened as

he had never been in all his life, and made his way round the corner to

wait there for an early cab to come by.

Thus had passed Montague Dartie in the forty-fifth year of his age from

the house which he had called his own.

When Winifred came down, and realised that he was not in the house,

her first feeling was one of dull anger that he should thus elude the

reproaches she had carefully prepared in those long wakeful hours. He

had gone off to Newmarket or Brighton, with that woman as likely as

not. Disgusting! Forced to a complete reticence before Imogen and the

servants, and aware that her father's nerves would never stand the

disclosure, she had been unable to refrain from going to Timothy's that

afternoon, and pouring out the story of the pearls to Aunts Juley and

Hester in utter confidence. It was only on the following morning that

she noticed the disappearance of that photograph. What did it mean?

Careful examination of her husband's relics prompted the thought that he

had gone for good. As that conclusion hardened she stood quite still in

the middle of his dressing-room, with all the drawers pulled out, to try

and realise what she was feeling. By no means easy! Though he was 'the

limit' he was yet her property, and for the life of her she could not

but feel the poorer. To be widowed yet not widowed at forty-two; with

four children; made conspicuous, an object of commiseration! Gone to the

arms of a Spanish Jade! Memories, feelings, which she had thought quite

dead, revived within her, painful, sullen, tenacious. Mechanically she

closed drawer after drawer, went to her bed, lay on it, and buried her

face in the pillows. She did not cry. What was the use of that? When she

got off her bed to go down to lunch she felt as if only one thing could

do her good, and that was to have Val home. He--her eldest boy--who

was to go to Oxford next month at James' expense, was at Littlehampton

taking his final gallops with his trainer for Smalls, as he would have

phrased it following his father's diction. She caused a telegram to be

sent to him.

"I must see about his clothes," she said to Imogen; "I can't have him

going up to Oxford all anyhow. Those boys are so particular."

"Val's got heaps of things," Imogen answered.

"I know; but they want overhauling. I hope he'll come."

"He'll come like a shot, Mother. But he'll probably skew his Exam."

"I can't help that," said Winifred. "I want him."

With an innocent shrewd look at her mother's face, Imogen kept silence.

It was father, of course! Val did come 'like a shot' at six o'clock.

Imagine a cross between a pickle and a Forsyte and you have young

Publius Valerius Dartie. A youth so named could hardly turn out

otherwise. When he was born, Winifred, in the heyday of spirits, and the

craving for distinction, had determined that her children should

have names such as no others had ever had. (It was a mercy--she felt

now--that she had just not named Imogen Thisbe.) But it was to George

Forsyte, always a wag, that Val's christening was due. It so happened

that Dartie, dining with him a week after the birth of his son and heir,

had mentioned this aspiration of Winifred's.

"Call him Cato," said George, "it'll be damned piquant!" He had just won

a tenner on a horse of that name.

"Cato!" Dartie had replied--they were a little 'on' as the phrase was

even in those days--"it's not a Christian name."

"Halo you!" George called to a waiter in knee breeches. "Bring me the

Encyc'pedia Brit. from the Library, letter C."

The waiter brought it.

"Here you are!" said George, pointing with his cigar: "Cato Publius

Valerius by Virgil out of Lydia. That's what you want. Publius Valerius

is Christian enough."

Dartie, on arriving home, had informed Winifred. She had been charmed.

It was so 'chic.' And Publius Valerius became the baby's name, though

it afterwards transpired that they had got hold of the inferior Cato. In

1890, however, when little Publius was nearly ten, the word 'chic' went

out of fashion, and sobriety came in; Winifred began to have doubts.

They were confirmed by little Publius himself who returned from his

first term at school complaining that life was a burden to him--they

called him Pubby. Winifred--a woman of real decision--promptly changed

his school and his name to Val, the Publius being dropped even as an

initial.

At nineteen he was a limber, freckled youth with a wide mouth, light

eyes, long dark lashes; a rather charming smile, considerable knowledge

of what he should not know, and no experience of what he ought to do.

Few boys had more narrowly escaped being expelled--the engaging rascal.

After kissing his mother and pinching Imogen, he ran upstairs three at a

time, and came down four, dressed for dinner. He was awfully sorry, but

his 'trainer,' who had come up too, had asked him to dine at the Oxford

and Cambridge; it wouldn't do to miss--the old chap would be hurt.

Winifred let him go with an unhappy pride. She had wanted him at home,

but it was very nice to know that his tutor was so fond of him. He went

out with a wink at Imogen, saying: "I say, Mother, could I have two

plover's eggs when I come in?--cook's got some. They top up so jolly

well. Oh! and look here--have you any money?--I had to borrow a fiver

from old Snobby."

Winifred, looking at him with fond shrewdness, answered:

"My dear, you are naughty about money. But you shouldn't pay him

to-night, anyway; you're his guest. How nice and slim he looked in his

white waistcoat, and his dark thick lashes!"

"Oh, but we may go to the theatre, you see, Mother; and I think I ought

to stand the tickets; he's always hard up, you know."

Winifred produced a five-pound note, saying:

"Well, perhaps you'd better pay him, but you mustn't stand the tickets

too."

Val pocketed the fiver.

"If I do, I can't," he said. "Good-night, Mum!"

He went out with his head up and his hat cocked joyously, sniffing the

air of Piccadilly like a young hound loosed into covert. Jolly good biz!

After that mouldy old slow hole down there!

He found his 'tutor,' not indeed at the Oxford and Cambridge, but at the

Goat's Club. This 'tutor' was a year older than himself, a good-looking

youth, with fine brown eyes, and smooth dark hair, a small mouth, an

oval face, languid, immaculate, cool to a degree, one of those young men

who without effort establish moral ascendancy over their companions. He

had missed being expelled from school a year before Val, had spent that

year at Oxford, and Val could almost see a halo round his head. His name

was Crum, and no one could get through money quicker. It seemed to

be his only aim in life--dazzling to young Val, in whom, however, the

Forsyte would stand apart, now and then, wondering where the value for

that money was.

They dined quietly, in style and taste; left the Club smoking cigars,

with just two bottles inside them, and dropped into stalls at the

Liberty. For Val the sound of comic songs, the sight of lovely legs

were fogged and interrupted by haunting fears that he would never equal

Crum's quiet dandyism. His idealism was roused; and when that is so, one

is never quite at ease. Surely he had too wide a mouth, not the best cut

of waistcoat, no braid on his trousers, and his lavender gloves had no

thin black stitchings down the back. Besides, he laughed too much--Crum

never laughed, he only smiled, with his regular dark brows raised a

little so that they formed a gable over his just drooped lids. No! he

would never be Crum's equal. All the same it was a jolly good show,

and Cynthia Dark simply ripping. Between the acts Crum regaled him with

particulars of Cynthia's private life, and the awful knowledge became

Val's that, if he liked, Crum could go behind. He simply longed to say:

"I say, take me!" but dared not, because of his deficiencies; and this

made the last act or two almost miserable. On coming out Crum said:

"It's half an hour before they close; let's go on to the Pandemonium."

They took a hansom to travel the hundred yards, and seats costing

seven-and-six apiece because they were going to stand, and walked into

the Promenade. It was in these little things, this utter negligence of

money that Crum had such engaging polish. The ballet was on its last

legs and night, and the traffic of the Promenade was suffering for the

moment. Men and women were crowded in three rows against the barrier.

The whirl and dazzle on the stage, the half dark, the mingled tobacco

fumes and women's scent, all that curious lure to promiscuity which

belongs to Promenades, began to free young Val from his idealism. He

looked admiringly in a young woman's face, saw she was not young, and

quickly looked away. Shades of Cynthia Dark! The young woman's arm

touched his unconsciously; there was a scent of musk and mignonette. Val

looked round the corner of his lashes. Perhaps she was young, after all.

Her foot trod on his; she begged his pardon. He said:

"Not at all; jolly good ballet, isn't it?"

"Oh, I'm tired of it; aren't you?"

Young Val smiled--his wide, rather charming smile. Beyond that he did

not go--not yet convinced. The Forsyte in him stood out for greater

certainty. And on the stage the ballet whirled its kaleidoscope of

snow-white, salmon-pink, and emerald-green and violet and seemed

suddenly to freeze into a stilly spangled pyramid. Applause broke out,

and it was over! Maroon curtains had cut it off. The semi-circle of men

and women round the barrier broke up, the young woman's arm pressed his.

A little way off disturbance seemed centring round a man with a pink

carnation; Val stole another glance at the young woman, who was looking

towards it. Three men, unsteady, emerged, walking arm in arm. The one in

the centre wore the pink carnation, a white waistcoat, a dark moustache;

he reeled a little as he walked. Crum's voice said slow and level: "Look

at that bounder, he's screwed!" Val turned to look. The 'bounder' had

disengaged his arm, and was pointing straight at them. Crum's voice,

level as ever, said:

"He seems to know you!" The 'bounder' spoke:

"H'llo!" he said. "You f'llows, look! There's my young rascal of a son!"

Val saw. It was his father! He could have sunk into the crimson carpet.

It was not the meeting in this place, not even that his father

was 'screwed'; it was Crum's word 'bounder,' which, as by heavenly

revelation, he perceived at that moment to be true. Yes, his father

looked a bounder with his dark good looks, and his pink carnation, and

his square, self-assertive walk. And without a word he ducked behind the

young woman and slipped out of the Promenade. He heard the word, "Val!"

behind him, and ran down deep-carpeted steps past the 'chuckersout,'

into the Square.

To be ashamed of his own father is perhaps the bitterest experience

a young man can go through. It seemed to Val, hurrying away, that his

career had ended before it had begun. How could he go up to Oxford now

amongst all those chaps, those splendid friends of Crum's, who would

know that his father was a 'bounder'! And suddenly he hated Crum. Who

the devil was Crum, to say that? If Crum had been beside him at that

moment, he would certainly have been jostled off the pavement. His own

father--his own! A choke came up in his throat, and he dashed his hands

down deep into his overcoat pockets. Damn Crum! He conceived the wild

idea of running back and fending his father, taking him by the arm and

walking about with him in front of Crum; but gave it up at once and

pursued his way down Piccadilly. A young woman planted herself before

him. "Not so angry, darling!" He shied, dodged her, and suddenly became

quite cool. If Crum ever said a word, he would jolly well punch his

head, and there would be an end of it. He walked a hundred yards or

more, contented with that thought, then lost its comfort utterly. It

wasn't simple like that! He remembered how, at school, when some parent

came down who did not pass the standard, it just clung to the fellow

afterwards. It was one of those things nothing could remove. Why had

his mother married his father, if he was a 'bounder'? It was bitterly

unfair--jolly low-down on a fellow to give him a 'bounder' for father.

The worst of it was that now Crum had spoken the word, he realised that

he had long known subconsciously that his father was not 'the clean

potato.' It was the beastliest thing that had ever happened to

him--beastliest thing that had ever happened to any fellow! And,

down-hearted as he had never yet been, he came to Green Street, and let

himself in with a smuggled latch-key. In the dining-room his plover's

eggs were set invitingly, with some cut bread and butter, and a little

whisky at the bottom of a decanter--just enough, as Winifred had

thought, for him to feel himself a man. It made him sick to look at

them, and he went upstairs.

Winifred heard him pass, and thought: 'The dear boy's in. Thank

goodness! If he takes after his father I don't know what I shall do! But

he won't he's like me. Dear Val!'

CHAPTER III--SOAMES PREPARES TO TAKE STEPS

When Soames entered his sister's little Louis Quinze drawing-room, with

its small balcony, always flowered with hanging geraniums in the summer,

and now with pots of Lilium Auratum, he was struck by the immutability

of human affairs. It looked just the same as on his first visit to the

newly married Darties twenty-one years ago. He had chosen the furniture

himself, and so completely that no subsequent purchase had ever been

able to change the room's atmosphere. Yes, he had founded his sister

well, and she had wanted it. Indeed, it said a great deal for Winifred

that after all this time with Dartie she remained well-founded. From

the first Soames had nosed out Dartie's nature from underneath the

plausibility, savoir faire, and good looks which had dazzled Winifred,

her mother, and even James, to the extent of permitting the fellow to

marry his daughter without bringing anything but shares of no value into

settlement.

Winifred, whom he noticed next to the furniture, was sitting at her Buhl

bureau with a letter in her hand. She rose and came towards him. Tall as

himself, strong in the cheekbones, well tailored, something in her face

disturbed Soames. She crumpled the letter in her hand, but seemed to

change her mind and held it out to him. He was her lawyer as well as her

brother.

Soames read, on Iseeum Club paper, these words:

'You will not get chance to insult in my own again. I am leaving country

to-morrow. It's played out. I'm tired of being insulted by you. You've

brought on yourself. No self-respecting man can stand it. I shall not

ask you for anything again. Good-bye. I took the photograph of the two

girls. Give them my love. I don't care what your family say. It's all

their doing. I'm going to live new life. 'M.D.'

This after-dinner note had a splotch on it not yet quite dry. He looked

at Winifred--the splotch had clearly come from her; and he checked the

words: 'Good riddance!' Then it occurred to him that with this letter

she was entering that very state which he himself so earnestly desired

to quit--the state of a Forsyte who was not divorced.

Winifred had turned away, and was taking a long sniff from a little

gold-topped bottle. A dull commiseration, together with a vague sense of

injury, crept about Soames' heart. He had come to her to talk of his

own position, and get sympathy, and here was she in the same position,

wanting of course to talk of it, and get sympathy from him. It was

always like that! Nobody ever seemed to think that he had troubles and

interests of his own. He folded up the letter with the splotch inside,

and said:

"What's it all about, now?"

Winifred recited the story of the pearls calmly.

"Do you think he's really gone, Soames? You see the state he was in when

he wrote that."

Soames who, when he desired a thing, placated Providence by pretending

that he did not think it likely to happen, answered:

"I shouldn't think so. I might find out at his Club."

"If George is there," said Winifred, "he would know."

"George?" said Soames; "I saw him at his father's funeral."

"Then he's sure to be there."

Soames, whose good sense applauded his sister's acumen, said grudgingly:

"Well, I'll go round. Have you said anything in Park Lane?"

"I've told Emily," returned Winifred, who retained that 'chic' way of

describing her mother. "Father would have a fit."

Indeed, anything untoward was now sedulously kept from James. With

another look round at the furniture, as if to gauge his sister's exact

position, Soames went out towards Piccadilly. The evening was drawing

in--a touch of chill in the October haze. He walked quickly, with his

close and concentrated air. He must get through, for he wished to dine

in Soho. On hearing from the hall porter at the Iseeum that Mr. Dartie

had not been in to-day, he looked at the trusty fellow and decided only

to ask if Mr. George Forsyte was in the Club. He was. Soames, who always

looked askance at his cousin George, as one inclined to jest at his

expense, followed the pageboy, slightly reassured by the thought that

George had just lost his father. He must have come in for about thirty

thousand, besides what he had under that settlement of Roger's, which

had avoided death duty. He found George in a bow-window, staring out

across a half-eaten plate of muffins. His tall, bulky, black-clothed

figure loomed almost threatening, though preserving still the

supernatural neatness of the racing man. With a faint grin on his fleshy

face, he said:

"Hallo, Soames! Have a muffin?"

"No, thanks," murmured Soames; and, nursing his hat, with the desire to

say something suitable and sympathetic, added:

"How's your mother?"

"Thanks," said George; "so-so. Haven't seen you for ages. You never go

racing. How's the City?"

Soames, scenting the approach of a jest, closed up, and answered:

"I wanted to ask you about Dartie. I hear he's...."

"Flitted, made a bolt to Buenos Aires with the fair Lola. Good for

Winifred and the little Darties. He's a treat."

Soames nodded. Naturally inimical as these cousins were, Dartie made

them kin.

"Uncle James'll sleep in his bed now," resumed George; "I suppose he's

had a lot off you, too."

Soames smiled.

"Ah! You saw him further," said George amicably. "He's a real rouser.

Young Val will want a bit of looking after. I was always sorry for

Winifred. She's a plucky woman."

Again Soames nodded. "I must be getting back to her," he said; "she just

wanted to know for certain. We may have to take steps. I suppose there's

no mistake?"

"It's quite O.K.," said George--it was he who invented so many of those

quaint sayings which have been assigned to other sources. "He was drunk

as a lord last night; but he went off all right this morning. His ship's

the Tuscarora;" and, fishing out a card, he read mockingly:

"'Mr. Montague Dartie, Poste Restante, Buenos Aires.' I should hurry up

with the steps, if I were you. He fairly fed me up last night."

"Yes," said Soames; "but it's not always easy." Then, conscious from

George's eyes that he had roused reminiscence of his own affair, he got

up, and held out his hand. George rose too.

"Remember me to Winifred.... You'll enter her for the Divorce Stakes

straight off if you ask me."

Soames took a sidelong look back at him from the doorway. George had

seated himself again and was staring before him; he looked big and

lonely in those black clothes. Soames had never known him so subdued. 'I

suppose he feels it in a way,' he thought. 'They must have about fifty

thousand each, all told. They ought to keep the estate together. If

there's a war, house property will go down. Uncle Roger was a good

judge, though.' And the face of Annette rose before him in the darkening

street; her brown hair and her blue eyes with their dark lashes, her

fresh lips and cheeks, dewy and blooming in spite of London, her perfect

French figure. 'Take steps!' he thought. Re-entering Winifred's house

he encountered Val, and they went in together. An idea had occurred to

Soames. His cousin Jolyon was Irene's trustee, the first step would be

to go down and see him at Robin Hill. Robin Hill! The odd--the very odd

feeling those words brought back! Robin Hill--the house Bosinney had

built for him and Irene--the house they had never lived in--the fatal

house! And Jolyon lived there now! H'm! And suddenly he thought: 'They

say he's got a boy at Oxford! Why not take young Val down and introduce

them! It's an excuse! Less bald--very much less bald!' So, as they went

upstairs, he said to Val:

"You've got a cousin at Oxford; you've never met him. I should like to

take you down with me to-morrow to where he lives and introduce you.

You'll find it useful."

Val, receiving the idea with but moderate transports, Soames clinched

it.

"I'll call for you after lunch. It's in the country--not far; you'll

enjoy it."

On the threshold of the drawing-room he recalled with an effort that the

steps he contemplated concerned Winifred at the moment, not himself.

Winifred was still sitting at her Buhl bureau.

"It's quite true," he said; "he's gone to Buenos Aires, started this

morning--we'd better have him shadowed when he lands. I'll cable at

once. Otherwise we may have a lot of expense. The sooner these things

are done the better. I'm always regretting that I didn't..." he stopped,

and looked sidelong at the silent Winifred. "By the way," he went on,

"can you prove cruelty?"

Winifred said in a dull voice:

"I don't know. What is cruelty?"

"Well, has he struck you, or anything?"

Winifred shook herself, and her jaw grew square.

"He twisted my arm. Or would pointing a pistol count? Or being too drunk

to undress himself, or--No--I can't bring in the children."

"No," said Soames; "no! I wonder! Of course, there's legal

separation--we can get that. But separation! Um!"

"What does it mean?" asked Winifred desolately.

"That he can't touch you, or you him; you're both of you married and

unmarried." And again he grunted. What was it, in fact, but his own

accursed position, legalised! No, he would not put her into that!

"It must be divorce," he said decisively; "failing cruelty, there's

desertion. There's a way of shortening the two years, now. We get the

Court to give us restitution of conjugal rights. Then if he doesn't

obey, we can bring a suit for divorce in six months' time. Of course you

don't want him back. But they won't know that. Still, there's the risk

that he might come. I'd rather try cruelty."

Winifred shook her head. "It's so beastly."

"Well," Soames murmured, "perhaps there isn't much risk so long as he's

infatuated and got money. Don't say anything to anybody, and don't pay

any of his debts."

Winifred sighed. In spite of all she had been through, the sense of loss

was heavy on her. And this idea of not paying his debts any more brought

it home to her as nothing else yet had. Some richness seemed to have

gone out of life. Without her husband, without her pearls, without that

intimate sense that she made a brave show above the domestic whirlpool,

she would now have to face the world. She felt bereaved indeed.

And into the chilly kiss he placed on her forehead, Soames put more than

his usual warmth.

"I have to go down to Robin Hill to-morrow," he said, "to see young

Jolyon on business. He's got a boy at Oxford. I'd like to take Val with

me and introduce him. Come down to 'The Shelter' for the week-end and

bring the children. Oh! by the way, no, that won't do; I've got some

other people coming." So saying, he left her and turned towards Soho.

CHAPTER IV--SOHO

Of all quarters in the queer adventurous amalgam called London, Soho is

perhaps least suited to the Forsyte spirit. 'So-ho, my wild one!' George

would have said if he had seen his cousin going there. Untidy, full

of Greeks, Ishmaelites, cats, Italians, tomatoes, restaurants, organs,

coloured stuffs, queer names, people looking out of upper windows,

it dwells remote from the British Body Politic. Yet has it haphazard

proprietary instincts of its own, and a certain possessive prosperity

which keeps its rents up when those of other quarters go down. For

long years Soames' acquaintanceship with Soho had been confined to its

Western bastion, Wardour Street. Many bargains had he picked up there.

Even during those seven years at Brighton after Bosinney's death and

Irene's flight, he had bought treasures there sometimes, though he had

no place to put them; for when the conviction that his wife had gone for

good at last became firm within him, he had caused a board to be put up

in Montpellier Square:

FOR SALE

THE LEASE OF THIS DESIRABLE RESIDENCE

Enquire of Messrs. Lesson and Tukes,

Court Street, Belgravia.

It had sold within a week--that desirable residence, in the shadow of

whose perfection a man and a woman had eaten their hearts out.

Of a misty January evening, just before the board was taken down, Soames

had gone there once more, and stood against the Square railings, looking

at its unlighted windows, chewing the cud of possessive memories which

had turned so bitter in the mouth. Why had she never loved him? Why?

She had been given all she had wanted, and in return had given him, for

three long years, all he had wanted--except, indeed, her heart. He had

uttered a little involuntary groan, and a passing policeman had glanced

suspiciously at him who no longer possessed the right to enter that

green door with the carved brass knocker beneath the board 'For Sale!' A

choking sensation had attacked his throat, and he had hurried away into

the mist. That evening he had gone to Brighton to live....

Approaching Malta Street, Soho, and the Restaurant Bretagne, where

Annette would be drooping her pretty shoulders over her accounts, Soames

thought with wonder of those seven years at Brighton. How had he managed

to go on so long in that town devoid of the scent of sweetpeas, where he

had not even space to put his treasures? True, those had been years

with no time at all for looking at them--years of almost passionate

money-making, during which Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte had become

solicitors to more limited Companies than they could properly attend to.

Up to the City of a morning in a Pullman car, down from the City of an

evening in a Pullman car. Law papers again after dinner, then the sleep

of the tired, and up again next morning. Saturday to Monday was spent at

his Club in town--curious reversal of customary procedure, based on the

deep and careful instinct that while working so hard he needed sea air

to and from the station twice a day, and while resting must indulge his

domestic affections. The Sunday visit to his family in Park Lane, to

Timothy's, and to Green Street; the occasional visits elsewhere had

seemed to him as necessary to health as sea air on weekdays. Even since

his migration to Mapledurham he had maintained those habits until--he

had known Annette.

Whether Annette had produced the revolution in his outlook, or that

outlook had produced Annette, he knew no more than we know where a

circle begins. It was intricate and deeply involved with the growing

consciousness that property without anyone to leave it to is the

negation of true Forsyteism. To have an heir, some continuance of self,

who would begin where he left off--ensure, in fact, that he would not

leave off--had quite obsessed him for the last year and more. After

buying a bit of Wedgwood one evening in April, he had dropped into Malta

Street to look at a house of his father's which had been turned into a

restaurant--a risky proceeding, and one not quite in accordance with the

terms of the lease. He had stared for a little at the outside painted

a good cream colour, with two peacock-blue tubs containing little

bay-trees in a recessed doorway--and at the words 'Restaurant Bretagne'

above them in gold letters, rather favourably impressed. Entering, he

had noticed that several people were already seated at little round

green tables with little pots of fresh flowers on them and Brittany-ware

plates, and had asked of a trim waitress to see the proprietor. They had

shown him into a back room, where a girl was sitting at a simple bureau

covered with papers, and a small round, table was laid for two. The

impression of cleanliness, order, and good taste was confirmed when

the girl got up, saying, "You wish to see Maman, Monsieur?" in a broken

accent.

"Yes," Soames had answered, "I represent your landlord; in fact, I'm his

son."

"Won't you sit down, sir, please? Tell Maman to come to this gentleman."

He was pleased that the girl seemed impressed, because it showed

business instinct; and suddenly he noticed that she was remarkably

pretty--so remarkably pretty that his eyes found a difficulty in leaving

her face. When she moved to put a chair for him, she swayed in a curious

subtle way, as if she had been put together by someone with a special

secret skill; and her face and neck, which was a little bared, looked

as fresh as if they had been sprayed with dew. Probably at this moment

Soames decided that the lease had not been violated; though to himself

and his father he based the decision on the efficiency of those illicit

adaptations in the building, on the signs of prosperity, and the obvious

business capacity of Madame Lamotte. He did not, however, neglect to

leave certain matters to future consideration, which had necessitated

further visits, so that the little back room had become quite accustomed

to his spare, not unsolid, but unobtrusive figure, and his pale, chinny

face with clipped moustache and dark hair not yet grizzling at the

sides.

"Un Monsieur tres distingue," Madame Lamotte found him; and presently,

"Tres amical, tres gentil," watching his eyes upon her daughter.

She was one of those generously built, fine-faced, dark-haired

Frenchwomen, whose every action and tone of voice inspire perfect

confidence in the thoroughness of their domestic tastes, their knowledge

of cooking, and the careful increase of their bank balances.

After those visits to the Restaurant Bretagne began, other visits

ceased--without, indeed, any definite decision, for Soames, like

all Forsytes, and the great majority of their countrymen, was a born

empiricist. But it was this change in his mode of life which had

gradually made him so definitely conscious that he desired to alter his

condition from that of the unmarried married man to that of the married

man remarried.

Turning into Malta Street on this evening of early October, 1899, he

bought a paper to see if there were any after-development of the Dreyfus

case--a question which he had always found useful in making closer

acquaintanceship with Madame Lamotte and her daughter, who were Catholic

and anti-Dreyfusard.

Scanning those columns, Soames found nothing French, but noticed a

general fall on the Stock Exchange and an ominous leader about the

Transvaal. He entered, thinking: 'War's a certainty. I shall sell my

consols.' Not that he had many, personally, the rate of interest was too

wretched; but he should advise his Companies--consols would assuredly go

down. A look, as he passed the doorways of the restaurant, assured him

that business was good as ever, and this, which in April would have

pleased him, now gave him a certain uneasiness. If the steps which

he had to take ended in his marrying Annette, he would rather see her

mother safely back in France, a move to which the prosperity of the

Restaurant Bretagne might become an obstacle. He would have to buy them

out, of course, for French people only came to England to make money;

and it would mean a higher price. And then that peculiar sweet sensation

at the back of his throat, and a slight thumping about the heart, which

he always experienced at the door of the little room, prevented his

thinking how much it would cost.

Going in, he was conscious of an abundant black skirt vanishing through

the door into the restaurant, and of Annette with her hands up to her

hair. It was the attitude in which of all others he admired her--so

beautifully straight and rounded and supple. And he said:

"I just came in to talk to your mother about pulling down that

partition. No, don't call her."

"Monsieur will have supper with us? It will be ready in ten minutes."

Soames, who still held her hand, was overcome by an impulse which

surprised him.

"You look so pretty to-night," he said, "so very pretty. Do you know how

pretty you look, Annette?"

Annette withdrew her hand, and blushed. "Monsieur is very good."

"Not a bit good," said Soames, and sat down gloomily.

Annette made a little expressive gesture with her hands; a smile was

crinkling her red lips untouched by salve.

And, looking at those lips, Soames said:

"Are you happy over here, or do you want to go back to France?"

"Oh, I like London. Paris, of course. But London is better than Orleans,

and the English country is so beautiful. I have been to Richmond last

Sunday."

Soames went through a moment of calculating struggle. Mapledurham! Dared

he? After all, dared he go so far as that, and show her what there was

to look forward to! Still! Down there one could say things. In this room

it was impossible.

"I want you and your mother," he said suddenly, "to come for the

afternoon next Sunday. My house is on the river, it's not too late in

this weather; and I can show you some good pictures. What do you say?"

Annette clasped her hands.

"It will be lovelee. The river is so beautiful"

"That's understood, then. I'll ask Madame."

He need say no more to her this evening, and risk giving himself away.

But had he not already said too much? Did one ask restaurant proprietors

with pretty daughters down to one's country house without design? Madame

Lamotte would see, if Annette didn't. Well! there was not much that

Madame did not see. Besides, this was the second time he had stayed to

supper with them; he owed them hospitality.

Walking home towards Park Lane--for he was staying at his father's--with

the impression of Annette's soft clever hand within his own, his

thoughts were pleasant, slightly sensual, rather puzzled. Take steps!

What steps? How? Dirty linen washed in public? Pah! With his reputation

for sagacity, for far-sightedness and the clever extrication of others,

he, who stood for proprietary interests, to become the plaything of

that Law of which he was a pillar! There was something revolting in

the thought! Winifred's affair was bad enough! To have a double dose

of publicity in the family! Would not a liaison be better than that--a

liaison, and a son he could adopt? But dark, solid, watchful, Madame

Lamotte blocked the avenue of that vision. No! that would not work. It

was not as if Annette could have a real passion for him; one could not

expect that at his age. If her mother wished, if the worldly advantage

were manifestly great--perhaps! If not, refusal would be certain.

Besides, he thought: 'I'm not a villain. I don't want to hurt her; and

I don't want anything underhand. But I do want her, and I want a son!

There's nothing for it but divorce--somehow--anyhow--divorce!' Under the

shadow of the plane-trees, in the lamplight, he passed slowly along

the railings of the Green Park. Mist clung there among the bluish tree

shapes, beyond range of the lamps. How many hundred times he had walked

past those trees from his father's house in Park Lane, when he was quite

a young man; or from his own house in Montpellier Square in those four

years of married life! And, to-night, making up his mind to free himself

if he could of that long useless marriage tie, he took a fancy to walk

on, in at Hyde Park Corner, out at Knightsbridge Gate, just as he used

to when going home to Irene in the old days. What could she be like

now?--how had she passed the years since he last saw her, twelve years

in all, seven already since Uncle Jolyon left her that money? Was she

still beautiful? Would he know her if he saw her? 'I've not changed

much,' he thought; 'I expect she has. She made me suffer.' He remembered

suddenly one night, the first on which he went out to dinner alone--an

old Malburian dinner--the first year of their marriage. With what

eagerness he had hurried back; and, entering softly as a cat, had heard

her playing. Opening the drawing-room door noiselessly, he had stood

watching the expression on her face, different from any he knew, so much

more open, so confiding, as though to her music she was giving a heart

he had never seen. And he remembered how she stopped and looked round,

how her face changed back to that which he did know, and what an

icy shiver had gone through him, for all that the next moment he was

fondling her shoulders. Yes, she had made him suffer! Divorce! It seemed

ridiculous, after all these years of utter separation! But it would have

to be. No other way! 'The question,' he thought with sudden realism,

'is--which of us? She or me? She deserted me. She ought to pay for

it. There'll be someone, I suppose.' Involuntarily he uttered a little

snarling sound, and, turning, made his way back to Park Lane.

CHAPTER V--JAMES SEES VISIONS

The butler himself opened the door, and closing it softly, detained

Soames on the inner mat.

"The master's poorly, sir," he murmured. "He wouldn't go to bed till you

came in. He's still in the diningroom."

Soames responded in the hushed tone to which the house was now

accustomed.

"What's the matter with him, Warmson?"

"Nervous, sir, I think. Might be the funeral; might be Mrs. Dartie's

comin' round this afternoon. I think he overheard something. I've took

him in a negus. The mistress has just gone up."

Soames hung his hat on a mahogany stag's-horn.

"All right, Warmson, you can go to bed; I'll take him up myself." And he

passed into the dining-room.

James was sitting before the fire, in a big armchair, with a camel-hair

shawl, very light and warm, over his frock-coated shoulders, on to which

his long white whiskers drooped. His white hair, still fairly thick,

glistened in the lamplight; a little moisture from his fixed, light-grey

eyes stained the cheeks, still quite well coloured, and the long deep

furrows running to the corners of the clean-shaven lips, which moved

as if mumbling thoughts. His long legs, thin as a crow's, in shepherd's

plaid trousers, were bent at less than a right angle, and on one knee a

spindly hand moved continually, with fingers wide apart and glistening

tapered nails. Beside him, on a low stool, stood a half-finished glass

of negus, bedewed with beads of heat. There he had been sitting, with

intervals for meals, all day. At eighty-eight he was still organically

sound, but suffering terribly from the thought that no one ever told him

anything. It is, indeed, doubtful how he had become aware that Roger was

being buried that day, for Emily had kept it from him. She was always

keeping things from him. Emily was only seventy! James had a grudge

against his wife's youth. He felt sometimes that he would never have

married her if he had known that she would have so many years before

her, when he had so few. It was not natural. She would live fifteen or

twenty years after he was gone, and might spend a lot of money; she had

always had extravagant tastes. For all he knew she might want to buy

one of these motor-cars. Cicely and Rachel and Imogen and all the young

people--they all rode those bicycles now and went off Goodness knew

where. And now Roger was gone. He didn't know--couldn't tell! The

family was breaking up. Soames would know how much his uncle had left.

Curiously he thought of Roger as Soames' uncle not as his own brother.

Soames! It was more and more the one solid spot in a vanishing world.

Soames was careful; he was a warm man; but he had no one to leave

his money to. There it was! He didn't know! And there was that fellow

Chamberlain! For James' political principles had been fixed between '70

and '85 when 'that rascally Radical' had been the chief thorn in the

side of property and he distrusted him to this day in spite of his

conversion; he would get the country into a mess and make money go down

before he had done with it. A stormy petrel of a chap! Where was Soames?

He had gone to the funeral of course which they had tried to keep from

him. He knew that perfectly well; he had seen his son's trousers. Roger!

Roger in his coffin! He remembered how, when they came up from school

together from the West, on the box seat of the old Slowflyer in 1824,

Roger had got into the 'boot' and gone to sleep. James uttered a thin

cackle. A funny fellow--Roger--an original! He didn't know! Younger than

himself, and in his coffin! The family was breaking up. There was Val

going to the university; he never came to see him now. He would cost

a pretty penny up there. It was an extravagant age. And all the pretty

pennies that his four grandchildren would cost him danced before James'

eyes. He did not grudge them the money, but he grudged terribly the risk

which the spending of that money might bring on them; he grudged the

diminution of security. And now that Cicely had married, she might be

having children too. He didn't know--couldn't tell! Nobody thought of

anything but spending money in these days, and racing about, and having

what they called 'a good time.' A motor-car went past the window. Ugly

great lumbering thing, making all that racket! But there it was, the

country rattling to the dogs! People in such a hurry that they couldn't

even care for style--a neat turnout like his barouche and bays was worth

all those new-fangled things. And consols at 116! There must be a lot of

money in the country. And now there was this old Kruger! They had tried

to keep old Kruger from him. But he knew better; there would be a pretty

kettle of fish out there! He had known how it would be when that fellow

Gladstone--dead now, thank God! made such a mess of it after that

dreadful business at Majuba. He shouldn't wonder if the Empire split

up and went to pot. And this vision of the Empire going to pot filled

a full quarter of an hour with qualms of the most serious character. He

had eaten a poor lunch because of them. But it was after lunch that the

real disaster to his nerves occurred. He had been dozing when he

became aware of voices--low voices. Ah! they never told him anything!

Winifred's and her mother's. "Monty!" That fellow Dartie--always that

fellow Dartie! The voices had receded; and James had been left alone,

with his ears standing up like a hare's, and fear creeping about his

inwards. Why did they leave him alone? Why didn't they come and tell

him? And an awful thought, which through long years had haunted

him, concreted again swiftly in his brain. Dartie had gone

bankrupt--fraudulently bankrupt, and to save Winifred and the children,

he--James--would have to pay! Could he--could Soames turn him into a

limited company? No, he couldn't! There it was! With every minute before

Emily came back the spectre fiercened. Why, it might be forgery! With

eyes fixed on the doubted Turner in the centre of the wall, James

suffered tortures. He saw Dartie in the dock, his grandchildren in the

gutter, and himself in bed. He saw the doubted Turner being sold at

Jobson's, and all the majestic edifice of property in rags. He saw in

fancy Winifred unfashionably dressed, and heard in fancy Emily's voice

saying: "Now, don't fuss, James!" She was always saying: "Don't fuss!"

She had no nerves; he ought never to have married a woman eighteen years

younger than himself. Then Emily's real voice said:

"Have you had a nice nap, James?"

Nap! He was in torment, and she asked him that!

"What's this about Dartie?" he said, and his eyes glared at her.

Emily's self-possession never deserted her.

"What have you been hearing?" she asked blandly.

"What's this about Dartie?" repeated James. "He's gone bankrupt."

"Fiddle!"

James made a great effort, and rose to the full height of his stork-like

figure.

"You never tell me anything," he said; "he's gone bankrupt."

The destruction of that fixed idea seemed to Emily all that mattered at

the moment.

"He has not," she answered firmly. "He's gone to Buenos Aires."

If she had said "He's gone to Mars" she could not have dealt James

a more stunning blow; his imagination, invested entirely in British

securities, could as little grasp one place as the other.

"What's he gone there for?" he said. "He's got no money. What did he

take?"

Agitated within by Winifred's news, and goaded by the constant

reiteration of this jeremiad, Emily said calmly:

"He took Winifred's pearls and a dancer."

"What!" said James, and sat down.

His sudden collapse alarmed her, and smoothing his forehead, she said:

"Now, don't fuss, James!"

A dusky red had spread over James' cheeks and forehead.

"I paid for them," he said tremblingly; "he's a thief! I--I knew how it

would be. He'll be the death of me; he ...." Words failed him and he sat

quite still. Emily, who thought she knew him so well, was alarmed, and

went towards the sideboard where she kept some sal volatile. She could

not see the tenacious Forsyte spirit working in that thin, tremulous

shape against the extravagance of the emotion called up by this outrage

on Forsyte principles--the Forsyte spirit deep in there, saying: 'You

mustn't get into a fantod, it'll never do. You won't digest your lunch.

You'll have a fit!' All unseen by her, it was doing better work in James

than sal volatile.

"Drink this," she said.

James waved it aside.

"What was Winifred about," he said, "to let him take her pearls?" Emily

perceived the crisis past.

"She can have mine," she said comfortably. "I never wear them. She'd

better get a divorce."

"There you go!" said James. "Divorce! We've never had a divorce in the

family. Where's Soames?"

"He'll be in directly."

"No, he won't," said James, almost fiercely; "he's at the funeral. You

think I know nothing."

"Well," said Emily with calm, "you shouldn't get into such fusses when

we tell you things." And plumping up his cushions, and putting the sal

volatile beside him, she left the room.

But James sat there seeing visions--of Winifred in the Divorce Court,

and the family name in the papers; of the earth falling on Roger's

coffin; of Val taking after his father; of the pearls he had paid for

and would never see again; of money back at four per cent., and the

country going to the dogs; and, as the afternoon wore into evening,

and tea-time passed, and dinnertime, those visions became more and more

mixed and menacing--of being told nothing, till he had nothing left of

all his wealth, and they told him nothing of it. Where was Soames? Why

didn't he come in?... His hand grasped the glass of negus, he raised it

to drink, and saw his son standing there looking at him. A little sigh

of relief escaped his lips, and putting the glass down, he said:

"There you are! Dartie's gone to Buenos Aires."

Soames nodded. "That's all right," he said; "good riddance."

A wave of assuagement passed over James' brain. Soames knew. Soames was

the only one of them all who had sense. Why couldn't he come and live at

home? He had no son of his own. And he said plaintively:

"At my age I get nervous. I wish you were more at home, my boy."

Again Soames nodded; the mask of his countenance betrayed no

understanding, but he went closer, and as if by accident touched his

father's shoulder.

"They sent their love to you at Timothy's," he said. "It went off all

right. I've been to see Winifred. I'm going to take steps." And he

thought: 'Yes, and you mustn't hear of them.'

James looked up; his long white whiskers quivered, his thin throat

between the points of his collar looked very gristly and naked.

"I've been very poorly all day," he said; "they never tell me anything."

Soames' heart twitched.

"Well, it's all right. There's nothing to worry about. Will you come up

now?" and he put his hand under his father's arm.

James obediently and tremulously raised himself, and together they went

slowly across the room, which had a rich look in the firelight, and out

to the stairs. Very slowly they ascended.

"Good-night, my boy," said James at his bedroom door.

"Good-night, father," answered Soames. His hand stroked down the sleeve

beneath the shawl; it seemed to have almost nothing in it, so thin was

the arm. And, turning away from the light in the opening doorway, he

went up the extra flight to his own bedroom.

'I want a son,' he thought, sitting on the edge of his bed; 'I want a

son.'

CHAPTER VI--NO-LONGER-YOUNG JOLYON AT HOME

Trees take little account of time, and the old oak on the upper lawn at

Robin Hill looked no day older than when Bosinney sprawled under it and

said to Soames: "Forsyte, I've found the very place for your house."

Since then Swithin had dreamed, and old Jolyon died, beneath its

branches. And now, close to the swing, no-longer-young Jolyon often

painted there. Of all spots in the world it was perhaps the most sacred

to him, for he had loved his father.

Contemplating its great girth--crinkled and a little mossed, but not yet

hollow--he would speculate on the passage of time. That tree had seen,

perhaps, all real English history; it dated, he shouldn't wonder, from

the days of Elizabeth at least. His own fifty years were as nothing

to its wood. When the house behind it, which he now owned, was three

hundred years of age instead of twelve, that tree might still be

standing there, vast and hollow--for who would commit such sacrilege as

to cut it down? A Forsyte might perhaps still be living in that house,

to guard it jealously. And Jolyon would wonder what the house would look

like coated with such age. Wistaria was already about its walls--the new

look had gone. Would it hold its own and keep the dignity Bosinney had

bestowed on it, or would the giant London have lapped it round and

made it into an asylum in the midst of a jerry-built wilderness? Often,

within and without of it, he was persuaded that Bosinney had been moved

by the spirit when he built. He had put his heart into that house,

indeed! It might even become one of the 'homes of England'--a rare

achievement for a house in these degenerate days of building. And

the aesthetic spirit, moving hand in hand with his Forsyte sense of

possessive continuity, dwelt with pride and pleasure on his ownership

thereof. There was the smack of reverence and ancestor-worship (if only

for one ancestor) in his desire to hand this house down to his son and

his son's son. His father had loved the house, had loved the view, the

grounds, that tree; his last years had been happy there, and no one had

lived there before him. These last eleven years at Robin Hill had formed

in Jolyon's life as a painter, the important period of success. He was

now in the very van of water-colour art, hanging on the line everywhere.

His drawings fetched high prices. Specialising in that one medium with

the tenacity of his breed, he had 'arrived'--rather late, but not too

late for a member of the family which made a point of living for

ever. His art had really deepened and improved. In conformity with his

position he had grown a short fair beard, which was just beginning to

grizzle, and hid his Forsyte chin; his brown face had lost the warped

expression of his ostracised period--he looked, if anything, younger.

The loss of his wife in 1894 had been one of those domestic tragedies

which turn out in the end for the good of all. He had, indeed, loved

her to the last, for his was an affectionate spirit, but she had become

increasingly difficult: jealous of her step-daughter June, jealous even

of her own little daughter Holly, and making ceaseless plaint that he

could not love her, ill as she was, and 'useless to everyone, and better

dead.' He had mourned her sincerely, but his face had looked younger

since she died. If she could only have believed that she made him happy,

how much happier would the twenty years of their companionship have

been!

June had never really got on well with her who had reprehensibly taken

her own mother's place; and ever since old Jolyon died she had been

established in a sort of studio in London. But she had come back to

Robin Hill on her stepmother's death, and gathered the reins there into

her small decided hands. Jolly was then at Harrow; Holly still learning

from Mademoiselle Beauce. There had been nothing to keep Jolyon at home,

and he had removed his grief and his paint-box abroad. There he had

wandered, for the most part in Brittany, and at last had fetched up

in Paris. He had stayed there several months, and come back with the

younger face and the short fair beard. Essentially a man who merely

lodged in any house, it had suited him perfectly that June should reign

at Robin Hill, so that he was free to go off with his easel where and

when he liked. She was inclined, it is true, to regard the house rather

as an asylum for her proteges! but his own outcast days had filled

Jolyon for ever with sympathy towards an outcast, and June's 'lame

ducks' about the place did not annoy him. By all means let her have them

down--and feed them up; and though his slightly cynical humour perceived

that they ministered to his daughter's love of domination as well as

moved her warm heart, he never ceased to admire her for having so many

ducks. He fell, indeed, year by year into a more and more detached and

brotherly attitude towards his own son and daughters, treating them with

a sort of whimsical equality. When he went down to Harrow to see Jolly,

he never quite knew which of them was the elder, and would sit eating

cherries with him out of one paper bag, with an affectionate and

ironical smile twisting up an eyebrow and curling his lips a little. And

he was always careful to have money in his pocket, and to be modish in

his dress, so that his son need not blush for him. They were perfect

friends, but never seemed to have occasion for verbal confidences, both

having the competitive self-consciousness of Forsytes. They knew they

would stand by each other in scrapes, but there was no need to talk

about it. Jolyon had a striking horror--partly original sin, but partly

the result of his early immorality--of the moral attitude. The most he

could ever have said to his son would have been:

"Look here, old man; don't forget you're a gentleman," and then have

wondered whimsically whether that was not a snobbish sentiment. The

great cricket match was perhaps the most searching and awkward time they

annually went through together, for Jolyon had been at Eton. They would

be particularly careful during that match, continually saying: "Hooray!

Oh! hard luck, old man!" or "Hooray! Oh! bad luck, Dad!" to each

other, when some disaster at which their hearts bounded happened to the

opposing school. And Jolyon would wear a grey top hat, instead of his

usual soft one, to save his son's feelings, for a black top hat he could

not stomach. When Jolly went up to Oxford, Jolyon went up with him,

amused, humble, and a little anxious not to discredit his boy amongst

all these youths who seemed so much more assured and old than himself.

He often thought, 'Glad I'm a painter' for he had long dropped

under-writing at Lloyds--'it's so innocuous. You can't look down on a

painter--you can't take him seriously enough.' For Jolly, who had a sort

of natural lordliness, had passed at once into a very small set, who

secretly amused his father. The boy had fair hair which curled a little,

and his grandfather's deepset iron-grey eyes. He was well-built and very

upright, and always pleased Jolyon's aesthetic sense, so that he was a

tiny bit afraid of him, as artists ever are of those of their own sex

whom they admire physically. On that occasion, however, he actually did

screw up his courage to give his son advice, and this was it:

"Look here, old man, you're bound to get into debt; mind you come to me

at once. Of course, I'll always pay them. But you might remember that

one respects oneself more afterwards if one pays one's own way. And

don't ever borrow, except from me, will you?"

And Jolly had said:

"All right, Dad, I won't," and he never had.

"And there's just one other thing. I don't know much about morality and

that, but there is this: It's always worth while before you do anything

to consider whether it's going to hurt another person more than is

absolutely necessary."

Jolly had looked thoughtful, and nodded, and presently had squeezed his

father's hand. And Jolyon had thought: 'I wonder if I had the right to

say that?' He always had a sort of dread of losing the dumb confidence

they had in each other; remembering how for long years he had lost his

own father's, so that there had been nothing between them but love at a

great distance. He under-estimated, no doubt, the change in the spirit

of the age since he himself went up to Cambridge in '65; and perhaps

he underestimated, too, his boy's power of understanding that he was

tolerant to the very bone. It was that tolerance of his, and possibly

his scepticism, which ever made his relations towards June so queerly

defensive. She was such a decided mortal; knew her own mind so terribly

well; wanted things so inexorably until she got them--and then, indeed,

often dropped them like a hot potato. Her mother had been like that,

whence had come all those tears. Not that his incompatibility with his

daughter was anything like what it had been with the first Mrs. Young

Jolyon. One could be amused where a daughter was concerned; in a wife's

case one could not be amused. To see June set her heart and jaw on a

thing until she got it was all right, because it was never anything

which interfered fundamentally with Jolyon's liberty--the one thing on

which his jaw was also absolutely rigid, a considerable jaw, under

that short grizzling beard. Nor was there ever any necessity for real

heart-to-heart encounters. One could break away into irony--as indeed

he often had to. But the real trouble with June was that she had never

appealed to his aesthetic sense, though she might well have, with

her red-gold hair and her viking-coloured eyes, and that touch of the

Berserker in her spirit. It was very different with Holly, soft and

quiet, shy and affectionate, with a playful imp in her somewhere. He

watched this younger daughter of his through the duckling stage with

extraordinary interest. Would she come out a swan? With her sallow oval

face and her grey wistful eyes and those long dark lashes, she might, or

she might not. Only this last year had he been able to guess. Yes, she

would be a swan--rather a dark one, always a shy one, but an authentic

swan. She was eighteen now, and Mademoiselle Beauce was gone--the

excellent lady had removed, after eleven years haunted by her continuous

reminiscences of the 'well-brrred little Tayleurs,' to another

family whose bosom would now be agitated by her reminiscences of the

'well-brrred little Forsytes.' She had taught Holly to speak French like

herself.

Portraiture was not Jolyon's forte, but he had already drawn his younger

daughter three times, and was drawing her a fourth, on the afternoon

of October 4th, 1899, when a card was brought to him which caused his

eyebrows to go up:

Mr. SOAMES FORSYTE

THE SHELTER, CONNOISSEURS CLUB, MAPLEDURHAM. ST. JAMES'S.

But here the Forsyte Saga must digress again....

To return from a long travel in Spain to a darkened house, to a little

daughter bewildered with tears, to the sight of a loved father lying

peaceful in his last sleep, had never been, was never likely to be,

forgotten by so impressionable and warm-hearted a man as Jolyon. A sense

as of mystery, too, clung to that sad day, and about the end of one

whose life had been so well-ordered, balanced, and above-board. It

seemed incredible that his father could thus have vanished without, as

it were, announcing his intention, without last words to his son, and

due farewells. And those incoherent allusions of little Holly to 'the

lady in grey,' of Mademoiselle Beauce to a Madame Errant (as it sounded)

involved all things in a mist, lifted a little when he read his father's

will and the codicil thereto. It had been his duty as executor of that

will and codicil to inform Irene, wife of his cousin Soames, of her life

interest in fifteen thousand pounds. He had called on her to explain

that the existing investment in India Stock, ear-marked to meet the

charge, would produce for her the interesting net sum of L430 odd a

year, clear of income tax. This was but the third time he had seen his

cousin Soames' wife--if indeed she was still his wife, of which he was

not quite sure. He remembered having seen her sitting in the Botanical

Gardens waiting for Bosinney--a passive, fascinating figure, reminding

him of Titian's 'Heavenly Love,' and again, when, charged by his father,

he had gone to Montpellier Square on the afternoon when Bosinney's

death was known. He still recalled vividly her sudden appearance in the

drawing-room doorway on that occasion--her beautiful face, passing from

wild eagerness of hope to stony despair; remembered the compassion he

had felt, Soames' snarling smile, his words, "We are not at home!" and

the slam of the front door.

This third time he saw a face and form more beautiful--freed from that

warp of wild hope and despair. Looking at her, he thought: 'Yes, you

are just what the Dad would have admired!' And the strange story of

his father's Indian summer became slowly clear to him. She spoke of old

Jolyon with reverence and tears in her eyes. "He was so wonderfully kind

to me; I don't know why. He looked so beautiful and peaceful sitting in

that chair under the tree; it was I who first came on him sitting

there, you know. Such a lovely day. I don't think an end could have been

happier. We should all like to go out like that."

'Quite right!' he had thought. 'We should all a like to go out in full

summer with beauty stepping towards us across a lawn.' And looking round

the little, almost empty drawing-room, he had asked her what she was

going to do now. "I am going to live again a little, Cousin Jolyon. It's

wonderful to have money of one's own. I've never had any. I shall keep

this flat, I think; I'm used to it; but I shall be able to go to Italy."

"Exactly!" Jolyon had murmured, looking at her faintly smiling lips; and

he had gone away thinking: 'A fascinating woman! What a waste! I'm

glad the Dad left her that money.' He had not seen her again, but every

quarter he had signed her cheque, forwarding it to her bank, with a

note to the Chelsea flat to say that he had done so; and always he

had received a note in acknowledgment, generally from the flat, but

sometimes from Italy; so that her personality had become embodied in

slightly scented grey paper, an upright fine handwriting, and the words,

'Dear Cousin Jolyon.' Man of property that he now was, the slender

cheque he signed often gave rise to the thought: 'Well, I suppose she

just manages'; sliding into a vague wonder how she was faring otherwise

in a world of men not wont to let beauty go unpossessed. At first

Holly had spoken of her sometimes, but 'ladies in grey' soon fade from

children's memories; and the tightening of June's lips in those first

weeks after her grandfather's death whenever her former friend's name

was mentioned, had discouraged allusion. Only once, indeed, had June

spoken definitely: "I've forgiven her. I'm frightfully glad she's

independent now...."

On receiving Soames' card, Jolyon said to the maid--for he could not

abide butlers--"Show him into the study, please, and say I'll be there

in a minute"; and then he looked at Holly and asked:

"Do you remember 'the lady in grey,' who used to give you

music-lessons?"

"Oh yes, why? Has she come?"

Jolyon shook his head, and, changing his holland blouse for a coat, was

silent, perceiving suddenly that such history was not for those young

ears. His face, in fact, became whimsical perplexity incarnate while he

journeyed towards the study.

Standing by the french-window, looking out across the terrace at the oak

tree, were two figures, middle-aged and young, and he thought: 'Who's

that boy? Surely they never had a child.'

The elder figure turned. The meeting of those two Forsytes of the second

generation, so much more sophisticated than the first, in the house

built for the one and owned and occupied by the other, was marked by

subtle defensiveness beneath distinct attempt at cordiality. 'Has he

come about his wife?' Jolyon was thinking; and Soames, 'How shall

I begin?' while Val, brought to break the ice, stood negligently

scrutinising this 'bearded pard' from under his dark, thick eyelashes.

"This is Val Dartie," said Soames, "my sister's son. He's just going up

to Oxford. I thought I'd like him to know your boy."

"Ah! I'm sorry Jolly's away. What college?"

"B.N.C.," replied Val.

"Jolly's at the 'House,' but he'll be delighted to look you up."

"Thanks awfully."

"Holly's in--if you could put up with a female relation, she'd show you

round. You'll find her in the hall if you go through the curtains. I was

just painting her."

With another "Thanks, awfully!" Val vanished, leaving the two cousins

with the ice unbroken.

"I see you've some drawings at the 'Water Colours,'" said Soames.

Jolyon winced. He had been out of touch with the Forsyte family at large

for twenty-six years, but they were connected in his mind with Frith's

'Derby Day' and Landseer prints. He had heard from June that Soames

was a connoisseur, which made it worse. He had become aware, too, of a

curious sensation of repugnance.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," he said.

"No," answered Soames between close lips, "not since--as a matter of

fact, it's about that I've come. You're her trustee, I'm told."

Jolyon nodded.

"Twelve years is a long time," said Soames rapidly: "I--I'm tired of

it."

Jolyon found no more appropriate answer than:

"Won't you smoke?"

"No, thanks."

Jolyon himself lit a cigarette.

"I wish to be free," said Soames abruptly.

"I don't see her," murmured Jolyon through the fume of his cigarette.

"But you know where she lives, I suppose?"

Jolyon nodded. He did not mean to give her address without permission.

Soames seemed to divine his thought.

"I don't want her address," he said; "I know it."

"What exactly do you want?"

"She deserted me. I want a divorce."

"Rather late in the day, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Soames. And there was a silence.

"I don't know much about these things--at least, I've forgotten," said

Jolyon with a wry smile. He himself had had to wait for death to grant

him a divorce from the first Mrs. Jolyon. "Do you wish me to see her

about it?"

Soames raised his eyes to his cousin's face. "I suppose there's

someone," he said.

A shrug moved Jolyon's shoulders.

"I don't know at all. I imagine you may have both lived as if the other

were dead. It's usual in these cases."

Soames turned to the window. A few early fallen oak-leaves strewed the

terrace already, and were rolling round in the wind. Jolyon saw the

figures of Holly and Val Dartie moving across the lawn towards the

stables. 'I'm not going to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds,'

he thought. 'I must act for her. The Dad would have wished that.' And

for a swift moment he seemed to see his father's figure in the old

armchair, just beyond Soames, sitting with knees crossed, The Times in

his hand. It vanished.

"My father was fond of her," he said quietly.

"Why he should have been I don't know," Soames answered without looking

round. "She brought trouble to your daughter June; she brought

trouble to everyone. I gave her all she wanted. I would have given her

even--forgiveness--but she chose to leave me."

In Jolyon compassion was checked by the tone of that close voice. What

was there in the fellow that made it so difficult to be sorry for him?

"I can go and see her, if you like," he said. "I suppose she might be

glad of a divorce, but I know nothing."

Soames nodded.

"Yes, please go. As I say, I know her address; but I've no wish to see

her." His tongue was busy with his lips, as if they were very dry.

"You'll have some tea?" said Jolyon, stifling the words: 'And see the

house.' And he led the way into the hall. When he had rung the bell and

ordered tea, he went to his easel to turn his drawing to the wall. He

could not bear, somehow, that his work should be seen by Soames, who was

standing there in the middle of the great room which had been designed

expressly to afford wall space for his own pictures. In his cousin's

face, with its unseizable family likeness to himself, and its chinny,

narrow, concentrated look, Jolyon saw that which moved him to the

thought: 'That chap could never forget anything--nor ever give himself

away. He's pathetic!'

CHAPTER VII--THE COLT AND THE FILLY

When young Val left the presence of the last generation he was thinking:

'This is jolly dull! Uncle Soames does take the bun. I wonder what this

filly's like?' He anticipated no pleasure from her society; and suddenly

he saw her standing there looking at him. Why, she was pretty! What

luck!

"I'm afraid you don't know me," he said. "My name's Val Dartie--I'm once

removed, second cousin, something like that, you know. My mother's name

was Forsyte."

Holly, whose slim brown hand remained in his because she was too shy to

withdraw it, said:

"I don't know any of my relations. Are there many?"

"Tons. They're awful--most of them. At least, I don't know--some of

them. One's relations always are, aren't they?"

"I expect they think one awful too," said Holly.

"I don't know why they should. No one could think you awful, of course."

Holly looked at him--the wistful candour in those grey eyes gave young

Val a sudden feeling that he must protect her.

"I mean there are people and people," he added astutely. "Your dad looks

awfully decent, for instance."

"Oh yes!" said Holly fervently; "he is."

A flush mounted in Val's cheeks--that scene in the Pandemonium

promenade--the dark man with the pink carnation developing into his own

father! "But you know what the Forsytes are," he said almost viciously.

"Oh! I forgot; you don't."

"What are they?"

"Oh! fearfully careful; not sportsmen a bit. Look at Uncle Soames!"

"I'd like to," said Holly.

Val resisted a desire to run his arm through hers. "Oh! no," he said,

"let's go out. You'll see him quite soon enough. What's your brother

like?"

Holly led the way on to the terrace and down to the lawn without

answering. How describe Jolly, who, ever since she remembered anything,

had been her lord, master, and ideal?

"Does he sit on you?" said Val shrewdly. "I shall be knowing him at

Oxford. Have you got any horses?"

Holly nodded. "Would you like to see the stables?"

"Rather!"

They passed under the oak tree, through a thin shrubbery, into the

stable-yard. There under a clock-tower lay a fluffy brown-and-white dog,

so old that he did not get up, but faintly waved the tail curled over

his back.

"That's Balthasar," said Holly; "he's so old--awfully old, nearly as old

as I am. Poor old boy! He's devoted to Dad."

"Balthasar! That's a rum name. He isn't purebred you know."

"No! but he's a darling," and she bent down to stroke the dog. Gentle

and supple, with dark covered head and slim browned neck and hands, she

seemed to Val strange and sweet, like a thing slipped between him and

all previous knowledge.

"When grandfather died," she said, "he wouldn't eat for two days. He saw

him die, you know."

"Was that old Uncle Jolyon? Mother always says he was a topper."

"He was," said Holly simply, and opened the stable door.

In a loose-box stood a silver roan of about fifteen hands, with a long

black tail and mane. "This is mine--Fairy."

"Ah!" said Val, "she's a jolly palfrey. But you ought to bang her tail.

She'd look much smarter." Then catching her wondering look, he thought

suddenly: 'I don't know--anything she likes!' And he took a long sniff

of the stable air. "Horses are ripping, aren't they? My Dad..." he

stopped.

"Yes?" said Holly.

An impulse to unbosom himself almost overcame him--but not quite. "Oh!

I don't know he's often gone a mucker over them. I'm jolly keen on them

too--riding and hunting. I like racing awfully, as well; I should like

to be a gentleman rider." And oblivious of the fact that he had but one

more day in town, with two engagements, he plumped out:

"I say, if I hire a gee to-morrow, will you come a ride in Richmond

Park?"

Holly clasped her hands.

"Oh yes! I simply love riding. But there's Jolly's horse; why don't you

ride him? Here he is. We could go after tea."

Val looked doubtfully at his trousered legs.

He had imagined them immaculate before her eyes in high brown boots and

Bedford cords.

"I don't much like riding his horse," he said. "He mightn't like it.

Besides, Uncle Soames wants to get back, I expect. Not that I believe

in buckling under to him, you know. You haven't got an uncle, have you?

This is rather a good beast," he added, scrutinising Jolly's horse, a

dark brown, which was showing the whites of its eyes. "You haven't got

any hunting here, I suppose?"

"No; I don't know that I want to hunt. It must be awfully exciting, of

course; but it's cruel, isn't it? June says so."

"Cruel?" ejaculated Val. "Oh! that's all rot. Who's June?"

"My sister--my half-sister, you know--much older than me." She had put

her hands up to both cheeks of Jolly's horse, and was rubbing her nose

against its nose with a gentle snuffling noise which seemed to have

an hypnotic effect on the animal. Val contemplated her cheek resting

against the horse's nose, and her eyes gleaming round at him. 'She's

really a duck,' he thought.

They returned to the house less talkative, followed this time by the

dog Balthasar, walking more slowly than anything on earth, and clearly

expecting them not to exceed his speed limit.

"This is a ripping place," said Val from under the oak tree, where they

had paused to allow the dog Balthasar to come up.

"Yes," said Holly, and sighed. "Of course I want to go everywhere. I

wish I were a gipsy."

"Yes, gipsies are jolly," replied Val, with a conviction which had just

come to him; "you're rather like one, you know."

Holly's face shone suddenly and deeply, like dark leaves gilded by the

sun.

"To go mad-rabbiting everywhere and see everything, and live in the

open--oh! wouldn't it be fun?"

"Let's do it!" said Val.

"Oh yes, let's!"

"It'd be grand sport, just you and I."

Then Holly perceived the quaintness and gushed.

"Well, we've got to do it," said Val obstinately, but reddening too.

"I believe in doing things you want to do. What's down there?"

"The kitchen-garden, and the pond and the coppice, and the farm."

"Let's go down!"

Holly glanced back at the house.

"It's tea-time, I expect; there's Dad beckoning."

Val, uttering a growly sound, followed her towards the house.

When they re-entered the hall gallery the sight of two middle-aged

Forsytes drinking tea together had its magical effect, and they became

quite silent. It was, indeed, an impressive spectacle. The two were

seated side by side on an arrangement in marqueterie which looked like

three silvery pink chairs made one, with a low tea-table in front of

them. They seemed to have taken up that position, as far apart as the

seat would permit, so that they need not look at each other too much;

and they were eating and drinking rather than talking--Soames with

his air of despising the tea-cake as it disappeared, Jolyon of finding

himself slightly amusing. To the casual eye neither would have seemed

greedy, but both were getting through a good deal of sustenance. The two

young ones having been supplied with food, the process went on silent

and absorbative, till, with the advent of cigarettes, Jolyon said to

Soames:

"And how's Uncle James?"

"Thanks, very shaky."

"We're a wonderful family, aren't we? The other day I was calculating

the average age of the ten old Forsytes from my father's family Bible.

I make it eighty-four already, and five still living. They ought to beat

the record;" and looking whimsically at Soames, he added:

"We aren't the men they were, you know."

Soames smiled. 'Do you really think I shall admit that I'm not their

equal'; he seemed to be saying, 'or that I've got to give up anything,

especially life?'

"We may live to their age, perhaps," pursued Jolyon, "but

self-consciousness is a handicap, you know, and that's the difference

between us. We've lost conviction. How and when self-consciousness was

born I never can make out. My father had a little, but I don't believe

any other of the old Forsytes ever had a scrap. Never to see yourself as

others see you, it's a wonderful preservative. The whole history of the

last century is in the difference between us. And between us and you,"

he added, gazing through a ring of smoke at Val and Holly, uncomfortable

under his quizzical regard, "there'll be--another difference. I wonder

what."

Soames took out his watch.

"We must go," he said, "if we're to catch our train."

"Uncle Soames never misses a train," muttered Val, with his mouth full.

"Why should I?" Soames answered simply.

"Oh! I don't know," grumbled Val, "other people do."

At the front door he gave Holly's slim brown hand a long and

surreptitious squeeze.

"Look out for me to-morrow," he whispered; "three o'clock. I'll wait for

you in the road; it'll save time. We'll have a ripping ride." He gazed

back at her from the lodge gate, and, but for the principles of a man

about town, would have waved his hand. He felt in no mood to tolerate

his uncle's conversation. But he was not in danger. Soames preserved a

perfect muteness, busy with far-away thoughts.

The yellow leaves came down about those two walking the mile and a half

which Soames had traversed so often in those long-ago days when he came

down to watch with secret pride the building of the house--that house

which was to have been the home of him and her from whom he was now

going to seek release. He looked back once, up that endless vista of

autumn lane between the yellowing hedges. What an age ago! "I don't want

to see her," he had said to Jolyon. Was that true? 'I may have to,' he

thought; and he shivered, seized by one of those queer shudderings that

they say mean footsteps on one's grave. A chilly world! A queer world!

And glancing sidelong at his nephew, he thought: 'Wish I were his age! I

wonder what she's like now!'

CHAPTER VIII--JOLYON PROSECUTES TRUSTEESHIP

When those two were gone Jolyon did not return to his painting, for

daylight was failing, but went to the study, craving unconsciously

a revival of that momentary vision of his father sitting in the old

leather chair with his knees crossed and his straight eyes gazing up

from under the dome of his massive brow. Often in this little room,

cosiest in the house, Jolyon would catch a moment of communion with his

father. Not, indeed, that he had definitely any faith in the persistence

of the human spirit--the feeling was not so logical--it was, rather,

an atmospheric impact, like a scent, or one of those strong animistic

impressions from forms, or effects of light, to which those with the

artist's eye are especially prone. Here only--in this little unchanged

room where his father had spent the most of his waking hours--could

be retrieved the feeling that he was not quite gone, that the steady

counsel of that old spirit and the warmth of his masterful lovability

endured.

What would his father be advising now, in this sudden recrudescence of

an old tragedy--what would he say to this menace against her to whom he

had taken such a fancy in the last weeks of his life? 'I must do my best

for her,' thought Jolyon; 'he left her to me in his will. But what is

the best?'

And as if seeking to regain the sapience, the balance and shrewd common

sense of that old Forsyte, he sat down in the ancient chair and

crossed his knees. But he felt a mere shadow sitting there; nor did any

inspiration come, while the fingers of the wind tapped on the darkening

panes of the french-window.

'Go and see her?' he thought, 'or ask her to come down here? What's her

life been? What is it now, I wonder? Beastly to rake up things at this

time of day.' Again the figure of his cousin standing with a hand on a

front door of a fine olive-green leaped out, vivid, like one of those

figures from old-fashioned clocks when the hour strikes; and his words

sounded in Jolyon's ears clearer than any chime: "I manage my own

affairs. I've told you once, I tell you again: We are not at home." The

repugnance he had then felt for Soames--for his flat-cheeked, shaven

face full of spiritual bull-doggedness; for his spare, square,

sleek figure slightly crouched as it were over the bone he could not

digest--came now again, fresh as ever, nay, with an odd increase. 'I

dislike him,' he thought, 'I dislike him to the very roots of me.

And that's lucky; it'll make it easier for me to back his wife.'

Half-artist, and half-Forsyte, Jolyon was constitutionally averse from

what he termed 'ructions'; unless angered, he conformed deeply to that

classic description of the she-dog, 'Er'd ruther run than fight.' A

little smile became settled in his beard. Ironical that Soames should

come down here--to this house, built for himself! How he had gazed and

gaped at this ruin of his past intention; furtively nosing at the walls

and stairway, appraising everything! And intuitively Jolyon thought: 'I

believe the fellow even now would like to be living here. He could never

leave off longing for what he once owned! Well, I must act, somehow or

other; but it's a bore--a great bore.'

Late that evening he wrote to the Chelsea flat, asking if Irene would

see him.

The old century which had seen the plant of individualism flower so

wonderfully was setting in a sky orange with coming storms. Rumours of

war added to the briskness of a London turbulent at the close of the

summer holidays. And the streets to Jolyon, who was not often up in

town, had a feverish look, due to these new motorcars and cabs, of which

he disapproved aesthetically. He counted these vehicles from his hansom,

and made the proportion of them one in twenty. 'They were one in thirty

about a year ago,' he thought; 'they've come to stay. Just so much more

rattling round of wheels and general stink'--for he was one of those

rather rare Liberals who object to anything new when it takes a material

form; and he instructed his driver to get down to the river quickly,

out of the traffic, desiring to look at the water through the mellowing

screen of plane-trees. At the little block of flats which stood back

some fifty yards from the Embankment, he told the cabman to wait, and

went up to the first floor.

Yes, Mrs. Heron was at home!

The effect of a settled if very modest income was at once apparent to

him remembering the threadbare refinement in that tiny flat eight

years ago when he announced her good fortune. Everything was now fresh,

dainty, and smelled of flowers. The general effect was silvery with

touches of black, hydrangea colour, and gold. 'A woman of great taste,'

he thought. Time had dealt gently with Jolyon, for he was a Forsyte.

But with Irene Time hardly seemed to deal at all, or such was his

impression. She appeared to him not a day older, standing there in

mole-coloured velvet corduroy, with soft dark eyes and dark gold hair,

with outstretched hand and a little smile.

"Won't you sit down?"

He had probably never occupied a chair with a fuller sense of

embarrassment.

"You look absolutely unchanged," he said.

"And you look younger, Cousin Jolyon."

Jolyon ran his hands through his hair, whose thickness was still a

comfort to him.

"I'm ancient, but I don't feel it. That's one thing about painting, it

keeps you young. Titian lived to ninety-nine, and had to have plague to

kill him off. Do you know, the first time I ever saw you I thought of a

picture by him?"

"When did you see me for the first time?"

"In the Botanical Gardens."

"How did you know me, if you'd never seen me before?"

"By someone who came up to you." He was looking at her hardily, but her

face did not change; and she said quietly:

"Yes; many lives ago."

"What is your recipe for youth, Irene?"

"People who don't live are wonderfully preserved."

H'm! a bitter little saying! People who don't live! But an opening, and

he took it. "You remember my Cousin Soames?"

He saw her smile faintly at that whimsicality, and at once went on:

"He came to see me the day before yesterday! He wants a divorce. Do

you?"

"I?" The word seemed startled out of her. "After twelve years? It's

rather late. Won't it be difficult?"

Jolyon looked hard into her face. "Unless...." he said.

"Unless I have a lover now. But I have never had one since."

What did he feel at the simplicity and candour of those words? Relief,

surprise, pity! Venus for twelve years without a lover!

"And yet," he said, "I suppose you would give a good deal to be free,

too?"

"I don't know. What does it matter, now?"

"But if you were to love again?"

"I should love." In that simple answer she seemed to sum up the whole

philosophy of one on whom the world had turned its back.

"Well! Is there anything you would like me to say to him?"

"Only that I'm sorry he's not free. He had his chance once. I don't know

why he didn't take it."

"Because he was a Forsyte; we never part with things, you know, unless

we want something in their place; and not always then."

Irene smiled. "Don't you, Cousin Jolyon?--I think you do."

"Of course, I'm a bit of a mongrel--not quite a pure Forsyte. I never

take the halfpennies off my cheques, I put them on," said Jolyon

uneasily.

"Well, what does Soames want in place of me now?"

"I don't know; perhaps children."

She was silent for a little, looking down.

"Yes," she murmured; "it's hard. I would help him to be free if I

could."

Jolyon gazed into his hat, his embarrassment was increasing fast; so

was his admiration, his wonder, and his pity. She was so lovely, and so

lonely; and altogether it was such a coil!

"Well," he said, "I shall have to see Soames. If there's anything I

can do for you I'm always at your service. You must think of me as a

wretched substitute for my father. At all events I'll let you know what

happens when I speak to Soames. He may supply the material himself."

She shook her head.

"You see, he has a lot to lose; and I have nothing. I should like him to

be free; but I don't see what I can do."

"Nor I at the moment," said Jolyon, and soon after took his leave. He

went down to his hansom. Half-past three! Soames would be at his office

still.

"To the Poultry," he called through the trap. In front of the Houses of

Parliament and in Whitehall, newsvendors were calling, "Grave situation

in the Transvaal!" but the cries hardly roused him, absorbed in

recollection of that very beautiful figure, of her soft dark glance, and

the words: "I have never had one since." What on earth did such a woman

do with her life, back-watered like this? Solitary, unprotected, with

every man's hand against her or rather--reaching out to grasp her at the

least sign. And year after year she went on like that!

The word 'Poultry' above the passing citizens brought him back to

reality.

'Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte,' in black letters on a ground the colour

of peasoup, spurred him to a sort of vigour, and he went up the stone

stairs muttering: "Fusty musty ownerships! Well, we couldn't do without

them!"

"I want Mr. Soames Forsyte," he said to the boy who opened the door.

"What name?"

"Mr. Jolyon Forsyte."

The youth looked at him curiously, never having seen a Forsyte with a

beard, and vanished.

The offices of 'Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte' had slowly absorbed the

offices of 'Tooting and Bowles,' and occupied the whole of the first

floor.

The firm consisted now of nothing but Soames and a number of managing

and articled clerks. The complete retirement of James some six years

ago had accelerated business, to which the final touch of speed had been

imparted when Bustard dropped off, worn out, as many believed, by the

suit of 'Fryer versus Forsyte,' more in Chancery than ever and less

likely to benefit its beneficiaries. Soames, with his saner grasp of

actualities, had never permitted it to worry him; on the contrary, he

had long perceived that Providence had presented him therein with L200 a

year net in perpetuity, and--why not?

When Jolyon entered, his cousin was drawing out a list of holdings in

Consols, which in view of the rumours of war he was going to advise his

companies to put on the market at once, before other companies did the

same. He looked round, sidelong, and said:

"How are you? Just one minute. Sit down, won't you?" And having entered

three amounts, and set a ruler to keep his place, he turned towards

Jolyon, biting the side of his flat forefinger....

"Yes?" he said.

"I have seen her."

Soames frowned.

"Well?"

"She has remained faithful to memory."

Having said that, Jolyon was ashamed. His cousin had flushed a dusky

yellowish red. What had made him tease the poor brute!

"I was to tell you she is sorry you are not free. Twelve years is a long

time. You know your law, and what chance it gives you." Soames uttered

a curious little grunt, and the two remained a full minute without

speaking. 'Like wax!' thought Jolyon, watching that close face, where

the flush was fast subsiding. 'He'll never give me a sign of what he's

thinking, or going to do. Like wax!' And he transferred his gaze to a

plan of that flourishing town, 'By-Street on Sea,' the future existence

of which lay exposed on the wall to the possessive instincts of the

firm's clients. The whimsical thought flashed through him: 'I wonder if

I shall get a bill of costs for this--"To attending Mr. Jolyon Forsyte

in the matter of my divorce, to receiving his account of his visit to

my wife, and to advising him to go and see her again, sixteen and

eightpence."'

Suddenly Soames said: "I can't go on like this. I tell you, I can't

go on like this." His eyes were shifting from side to side, like an

animal's when it looks for way of escape. 'He really suffers,' thought

Jolyon; 'I've no business to forget that, just because I don't like

him.'

"Surely," he said gently, "it lies with yourself. A man can always put

these things through if he'll take it on himself."

Soames turned square to him, with a sound which seemed to come from

somewhere very deep.

"Why should I suffer more than I've suffered already? Why should I?"

Jolyon could only shrug his shoulders. His reason agreed, his instinct

rebelled; he could not have said why.

"Your father," went on Soames, "took an interest in her--why, goodness

knows! And I suppose you do too?" he gave Jolyon a sharp look. "It seems

to me that one only has to do another person a wrong to get all the

sympathy. I don't know in what way I was to blame--I've never known.

I always treated her well. I gave her everything she could wish for. I

wanted her."

Again Jolyon's reason nodded; again his instinct shook its head. 'What

is it?' he thought; 'there must be something wrong in me. Yet if there

is, I'd rather be wrong than right.'

"After all," said Soames with a sort of glum fierceness, "she was my

wife."

In a flash the thought went through his listener: 'There it is!

Ownerships! Well, we all own things. But--human beings! Pah!'

"You have to look at facts," he said drily, "or rather the want of

them."

Soames gave him another quick suspicious look.

"The want of them?" he said. "Yes, but I am not so sure."

"I beg your pardon," replied Jolyon; "I've told you what she said. It

was explicit."

"My experience has not been one to promote blind confidence in her word.

We shall see."

Jolyon got up.

"Good-bye," he said curtly.

"Good-bye," returned Soames; and Jolyon went out trying to understand

the look, half-startled, half-menacing, on his cousin's face. He sought

Waterloo Station in a disturbed frame of mind, as though the skin of

his moral being had been scraped; and all the way down in the train he

thought of Irene in her lonely flat, and of Soames in his lonely

office, and of the strange paralysis of life that lay on them both.

'In chancery!' he thought. 'Both their necks in chancery--and her's so

pretty!'

CHAPTER IX--VAL HEARS THE NEWS

The keeping of engagements had not as yet been a conspicuous feature in

the life of young Val Dartie, so that when he broke two and kept one,

it was the latter event which caused him, if anything, the greater

surprise, while jogging back to town from Robin Hill after his ride with

Holly. She had been even prettier than he had thought her yesterday,

on her silver-roan, long-tailed 'palfrey'; and it seemed to him,

self-critical in the brumous October gloaming and the outskirts

of London, that only his boots had shone throughout their two-hour

companionship. He took out his new gold 'hunter'--present from

James--and looked not at the time, but at sections of his face in the

glittering back of its opened case. He had a temporary spot over one

eyebrow, and it displeased him, for it must have displeased her. Crum

never had any spots. Together with Crum rose the scene in the promenade

of the Pandemonium. To-day he had not had the faintest desire to

unbosom himself to Holly about his father. His father lacked poetry,

the stirrings of which he was feeling for the first time in his nineteen

years. The Liberty, with Cynthia Dark, that almost mythical embodiment

of rapture; the Pandemonium, with the woman of uncertain age--both

seemed to Val completely 'off,' fresh from communion with this new, shy,

dark-haired young cousin of his. She rode 'Jolly well,' too, so that it

had been all the more flattering that she had let him lead her where he

would in the long gallops of Richmond Park, though she knew them so

much better than he did. Looking back on it all, he was mystified by

the barrenness of his speech; he felt that he could say 'an awful lot of

fetching things' if he had but the chance again, and the thought that

he must go back to Littlehampton on the morrow, and to Oxford on the

twelfth--'to that beastly exam,' too--without the faintest chance of

first seeing her again, caused darkness to settle on his spirit even

more quickly than on the evening. He should write to her, however, and

she had promised to answer. Perhaps, too, she would come up to Oxford to

see her brother. That thought was like the first star, which came out as

he rode into Padwick's livery stables in the purlieus of Sloane Square.

He got off and stretched himself luxuriously, for he had ridden some

twenty-five good miles. The Dartie within him made him chaffer for

five minutes with young Padwick concerning the favourite for the

Cambridgeshire; then with the words, "Put the gee down to my account,"

he walked away, a little wide at the knees, and flipping his boots with

his knotty little cane. 'I don't feel a bit inclined to go out,' he

thought. 'I wonder if mother will stand fizz for my last night!' With

'fizz' and recollection, he could well pass a domestic evening.

When he came down, speckless after his bath, he found his mother

scrupulous in a low evening dress, and, to his annoyance, his Uncle

Soames. They stopped talking when he came in; then his uncle said:

"He'd better be told."

At those words, which meant something about his father, of course, Val's

first thought was of Holly. Was it anything beastly? His mother began

speaking.

"Your father," she said in her fashionably appointed voice, while her

fingers plucked rather pitifully at sea-green brocade, "your father, my

dear boy, has--is not at Newmarket; he's on his way to South America.

He--he's left us."

Val looked from her to Soames. Left them! Was he sorry? Was he fond of

his father? It seemed to him that he did not know. Then, suddenly--as at

a whiff of gardenias and cigars--his heart twitched within him, and

he was sorry. One's father belonged to one, could not go off in this

fashion--it was not done! Nor had he always been the 'bounder' of the

Pandemonium promenade. There were precious memories of tailors' shops

and horses, tips at school, and general lavish kindness, when in luck.

"But why?" he said. Then, as a sportsman himself, was sorry he had

asked. The mask of his mother's face was all disturbed; and he burst

out:

"All right, Mother, don't tell me! Only, what does it mean?"

"A divorce, Val, I'm afraid."

Val uttered a queer little grunt, and looked quickly at his uncle--that

uncle whom he had been taught to look on as a guarantee against the

consequences of having a father, even against the Dartie blood in his

own veins. The flat-checked visage seemed to wince, and this upset him.

"It won't be public, will it?"

So vividly before him had come recollection of his own eyes glued to the

unsavoury details of many a divorce suit in the Public Press.

"Can't it be done quietly somehow? It's so disgusting for--for mother,

and--and everybody."

"Everything will be done as quietly as it can, you may be sure."

"Yes--but, why is it necessary at all? Mother doesn't want to marry

again."

Himself, the girls, their name tarnished in the sight of his

schoolfellows and of Crum, of the men at Oxford, of--Holly! Unbearable!

What was to be gained by it?

"Do you, Mother?" he said sharply.

Thus brought face to face with so much of her own feeling by the one she

loved best in the world, Winifred rose from the Empire chair in which

she had been sitting. She saw that her son would be against her unless

he was told everything; and, yet, how could she tell him? Thus, still

plucking at the green brocade, she stared at Soames. Val, too, stared

at Soames. Surely this embodiment of respectability and the sense of

property could not wish to bring such a slur on his own sister!

Soames slowly passed a little inlaid paperknife over the smooth surface

of a marqueterie table; then, without looking at his nephew, he began:

"You don't understand what your mother has had to put up with these

twenty years. This is only the last straw, Val." And glancing up

sideways at Winifred, he added:

"Shall I tell him?"

Winifred was silent. If he were not told, he would be against her! Yet,

how dreadful to be told such things of his own father! Clenching her

lips, she nodded.

Soames spoke in a rapid, even voice:

"He has always been a burden round your mother's neck. She has paid

his debts over and over again; he has often been drunk, abused and

threatened her; and now he is gone to Buenos Aires with a dancer." And,

as if distrusting the efficacy of those words on the boy, he went on

quickly:

"He took your mother's pearls to give to her."

Val jerked up his hand, then. At that signal of distress Winifred cried

out:

"That'll do, Soames--stop!"

In the boy, the Dartie and the Forsyte were struggling. For debts,

drink, dancers, he had a certain sympathy; but the pearls--no! That was

too much! And suddenly he found his mother's hand squeezing his.

"You see," he heard Soames say, "we can't have it all begin over again.

There's a limit; we must strike while the iron's hot."

Val freed his hand.

"But--you're--never going to bring out that about the pearls! I couldn't

stand that--I simply couldn't!"

Winifred cried out:

"No, no, Val--oh no! That's only to show you how impossible your father

is!" And his uncle nodded. Somewhat assuaged, Val took out a

cigarette. His father had bought him that thin curved case. Oh! it was

unbearable--just as he was going up to Oxford!

"Can't mother be protected without?" he said. "I could look after her.

It could always be done later if it was really necessary."

A smile played for a moment round Soames' lips, and became bitter.

"You don't know what you're talking of; nothing's so fatal as delay in

such matters."

"Why?"

"I tell you, boy, nothing's so fatal. I know from experience."

His voice had the ring of exasperation. Val regarded him round-eyed,

never having known his uncle express any sort of feeling. Oh! Yes--he

remembered now--there had been an Aunt Irene, and something had

happened--something which people kept dark; he had heard his father once

use an unmentionable word of her.

"I don't want to speak ill of your father," Soames went on doggedly,

"but I know him well enough to be sure that he'll be back on your

mother's hands before a year's over. You can imagine what that will mean

to her and to all of you after this. The only thing is to cut the knot

for good."

In spite of himself, Val was impressed; and, happening to look at his

mother's face, he got what was perhaps his first real insight into the

fact that his own feelings were not always what mattered most.

"All right, mother," he said; "we'll back you up. Only I'd like to know

when it'll be. It's my first term, you know. I don't want to be up there

when it comes off."

"Oh! my dear boy," murmured Winifred, "it is a bore for you." So, by

habit, she phrased what, from the expression of her face, was the most

poignant regret. "When will it be, Soames?"

"Can't tell--not for months. We must get restitution first."

'What the deuce is that?' thought Val. 'What silly brutes lawyers are!

Not for months! I know one thing: I'm not going to dine in!' And he

said:

"Awfully sorry, mother, I've got to go out to dinner now."

Though it was his last night, Winifred nodded almost gratefully; they

both felt that they had gone quite far enough in the expression of

feeling.

Val sought the misty freedom of Green Street, reckless and depressed.

And not till he reached Piccadilly did he discover that he had only

eighteen-pence. One couldn't dine off eighteen-pence, and he was very

hungry. He looked longingly at the windows of the Iseeum Club, where he

had often eaten of the best with his father! Those pearls! There was no

getting over them! But the more he brooded and the further he walked the

hungrier he naturally became. Short of trailing home, there were only

two places where he could go--his grandfather's in Park Lane, and

Timothy's in the Bayswater Road. Which was the less deplorable? At his

grandfather's he would probably get a better dinner on the spur of the

moment. At Timothy's they gave you a jolly good feed when they expected

you, not otherwise. He decided on Park Lane, not unmoved by the thought

that to go up to Oxford without affording his grandfather a chance to

tip him was hardly fair to either of them. His mother would hear he had

been there, of course, and might think it funny; but he couldn't help

that. He rang the bell.

"Hullo, Warmson, any dinner for me, d'you think?"

"They're just going in, Master Val. Mr. Forsyte will be very glad to see

you. He was saying at lunch that he never saw you nowadays."

Val grinned.

"Well, here I am. Kill the fatted calf, Warmson, let's have fizz."

Warmson smiled faintly--in his opinion Val was a young limb.

"I will ask Mrs. Forsyte, Master Val."

"I say," Val grumbled, taking off his overcoat, "I'm not at school any

more, you know."

Warmson, not without a sense of humour, opened the door beyond the

stag's-horn coat stand, with the words:

"Mr. Valerus, ma'am."

"Confound him!" thought Val, entering.

A warm embrace, a "Well, Val!" from Emily, and a rather quavery "So

there you are at last!" from James, restored his sense of dignity.

"Why didn't you let us know? There's only saddle of mutton. Champagne,

Warmson," said Emily. And they went in.

At the great dining-table, shortened to its utmost, under which so many

fashionable legs had rested, James sat at one end, Emily at the other,

Val half-way between them; and something of the loneliness of his

grandparents, now that all their four children were flown, reached the

boy's spirit. 'I hope I shall kick the bucket long before I'm as old as

grandfather,' he thought. 'Poor old chap, he's as thin as a rail!' And

lowering his voice while his grandfather and Warmson were in discussion

about sugar in the soup, he said to Emily:

"It's pretty brutal at home, Granny. I suppose you know."

"Yes, dear boy."

"Uncle Soames was there when I left. I say, isn't there anything to be

done to prevent a divorce? Why is he so beastly keen on it?"

"Hush, my dear!" murmured Emily; "we're keeping it from your

grandfather."

James' voice sounded from the other end.

"What's that? What are you talking about?"

"About Val's college," returned Emily. "Young Pariser was there, James;

you remember--he nearly broke the Bank at Monte Carlo afterwards."

James muttered that he did not know--Val must look after himself up

there, or he'd get into bad ways. And he looked at his grandson with

gloom, out of which affection distrustfully glimmered.

"What I'm afraid of," said Val to his plate, "is of being hard up, you

know."

By instinct he knew that the weak spot in that old man was fear of

insecurity for his grandchildren.

"Well," said James, and the soup in his spoon dribbled over, "you'll

have a good allowance; but you must keep within it."

"Of course," murmured Val; "if it is good. How much will it be,

Grandfather?"

"Three hundred and fifty; it's too much. I had next to nothing at your

age."

Val sighed. He had hoped for four, and been afraid of three. "I don't

know what your young cousin has," said James; "he's up there. His

father's a rich man."

"Aren't you?" asked Val hardily.

"I?" replied James, flustered. "I've got so many expenses. Your

father...." and he was silent.

"Cousin Jolyon's got an awfully jolly place. I went down there with

Uncle Soames--ripping stables."

"Ah!" murmured James profoundly. "That house--I knew how it would be!"

And he lapsed into gloomy meditation over his fish-bones. His son's

tragedy, and the deep cleavage it had caused in the Forsyte family,

had still the power to draw him down into a whirlpool of doubts and

misgivings. Val, who hankered to talk of Robin Hill, because Robin Hill

meant Holly, turned to Emily and said:

"Was that the house built for Uncle Soames?" And, receiving her nod,

went on: "I wish you'd tell me about him, Granny. What became of Aunt

Irene? Is she still going? He seems awfully worked-up about something

to-night."

Emily laid her finger on her lips, but the word Irene had caught James'

ear.

"What's that?" he said, staying a piece of mutton close to his lips.

"Who's been seeing her? I knew we hadn't heard the last of that."

"Now, James," said Emily, "eat your dinner. Nobody's been seeing

anybody."

James put down his fork.

"There you go," he said. "I might die before you'd tell me of it. Is

Soames getting a divorce?"

"Nonsense," said Emily with incomparable aplomb; "Soames is much too

sensible."

James had sought his own throat, gathering the long white whiskers

together on the skin and bone of it.

"She--she was always...." he said, and with that enigmatic remark the

conversation lapsed, for Warmson had returned. But later, when the

saddle of mutton had been succeeded by sweet, savoury, and dessert,

and Val had received a cheque for twenty pounds and his grandfather's

kiss--like no other kiss in the world, from lips pushed out with a sort

of fearful suddenness, as if yielding to weakness--he returned to the

charge in the hall.

"Tell us about Uncle Soames, Granny. Why is he so keen on mother's

getting a divorce?"

"Your Uncle Soames," said Emily, and her voice had in it an exaggerated

assurance, "is a lawyer, my dear boy. He's sure to know best."

"Is he?" muttered Val. "But what did become of Aunt Irene? I remember

she was jolly good-looking."

"She--er...." said Emily, "behaved very badly. We don't talk about it."

"Well, I don't want everybody at Oxford to know about our affairs,"

ejaculated Val; "it's a brutal idea. Why couldn't father be prevented

without its being made public?"

Emily sighed. She had always lived rather in an atmosphere of divorce,

owing to her fashionable proclivities--so many of those whose legs had

been under her table having gained a certain notoriety. When, however,

it touched her own family, she liked it no better than other people. But

she was eminently practical, and a woman of courage, who never pursued a

shadow in preference to its substance.

"Your mother," she said, "will be happier if she's quite free, Val.

Good-night, my dear boy; and don't wear loud waistcoats up at Oxford,

they're not the thing just now. Here's a little present."

With another five pounds in his hand, and a little warmth in his heart,

for he was fond of his grandmother, he went out into Park Lane. A wind

had cleared the mist, the autumn leaves were rustling, and the stars

were shining. With all that money in his pocket an impulse to 'see

life' beset him; but he had not gone forty yards in the direction of

Piccadilly when Holly's shy face, and her eyes with an imp dancing in

their gravity, came up before him, and his hand seemed to be tingling

again from the pressure of her warm gloved hand. 'No, dash it!' he

thought, 'I'm going home!'

CHAPTER X--SOAMES ENTERTAINS THE FUTURE

It was full late for the river, but the weather was lovely, and summer

lingered below the yellowing leaves. Soames took many looks at the day

from his riverside garden near Mapledurham that Sunday morning.

With his own hands he put flowers about his little house-boat, and

equipped the punt, in which, after lunch, he proposed to take them on

the river. Placing those Chinese-looking cushions, he could not

tell whether or no he wished to take Annette alone. She was so very

pretty--could he trust himself not to say irrevocable words, passing

beyond the limits of discretion? Roses on the veranda were still in

bloom, and the hedges ever-green, so that there was almost nothing

of middle-aged autumn to chill the mood; yet was he nervous, fidgety,

strangely distrustful of his powers to steer just the right course. This

visit had been planned to produce in Annette and her mother a due sense

of his possessions, so that they should be ready to receive with respect

any overture he might later be disposed to make. He dressed with great

care, making himself neither too young nor too old, very thankful that

his hair was still thick and smooth and had no grey in it. Three times

he went up to his picture-gallery. If they had any knowledge at all,

they must see at once that his collection alone was worth at least

thirty thousand pounds. He minutely inspected, too, the pretty bedroom

overlooking the river where they would take off their hats. It would

be her bedroom if--if the matter went through, and she became his

wife. Going up to the dressing-table he passed his hand over the

lilac-coloured pincushion, into which were stuck all kinds of pins;

a bowl of pot-pourri exhaled a scent that made his head turn just a

little. His wife! If only the whole thing could be settled out of hand,

and there was not the nightmare of this divorce to be gone through

first; and with gloom puckered on his forehead, he looked out at the

river shining beyond the roses and the lawn. Madame Lamotte would never

resist this prospect for her child; Annette would never resist her

mother. If only he were free! He drove to the station to meet them. What

taste Frenchwomen had! Madame Lamotte was in black with touches of lilac

colour, Annette in greyish lilac linen, with cream coloured gloves and

hat. Rather pale she looked and Londony; and her blue eyes were demure.

Waiting for them to come down to lunch, Soames stood in the open

french-window of the diningroom moved by that sensuous delight in

sunshine and flowers and trees which only came to the full when youth

and beauty were there to share it with one. He had ordered the lunch

with intense consideration; the wine was a very special Sauterne, the

whole appointments of the meal perfect, the coffee served on the veranda

super-excellent. Madame Lamotte accepted creme de menthe; Annette

refused. Her manners were charming, with just a suspicion of 'the

conscious beauty' creeping into them. 'Yes,' thought Soames, 'another

year of London and that sort of life, and she'll be spoiled.'

Madame was in sedate French raptures. "Adorable! Le soleil est si bon!

How everything is chic, is it not, Annette? Monsieur is a real Monte

Cristo." Annette murmured assent, with a look up at Soames which he

could not read. He proposed a turn on the river. But to punt two persons

when one of them looked so ravishing on those Chinese cushions was

merely to suffer from a sense of lost opportunity; so they went but a

short way towards Pangbourne, drifting slowly back, with every now

and then an autumn leaf dropping on Annette or on her mother's

black amplitude. And Soames was not happy, worried by the thought:

'How--when--where--can I say--what?' They did not yet even know that

he was married. To tell them he was married might jeopardise his every

chance; yet, if he did not definitely make them understand that he

wished for Annette's hand, it would be dropping into some other clutch

before he was free to claim it.

At tea, which they both took with lemon, Soames spoke of the Transvaal.

"There'll be war," he said.

Madame Lamotte lamented.

"Ces pauvres gens bergers!" Could they not be left to themselves?

Soames smiled--the question seemed to him absurd.

Surely as a woman of business she understood that the British could not

abandon their legitimate commercial interests.

"Ah! that!" But Madame Lamotte found that the English were a little

hypocrite. They were talking of justice and the Uitlanders, not of

business. Monsieur was the first who had spoken to her of that.

"The Boers are only half-civilised," remarked Soames; "they stand in the

way of progress. It will never do to let our suzerainty go."

"What does that mean to say? Suzerainty!"

"What a strange word!" Soames became eloquent, roused by these threats

to the principle of possession, and stimulated by Annette's eyes fixed

on him. He was delighted when presently she said:

"I think Monsieur is right. They should be taught a lesson." She was

sensible!

"Of course," he said, "we must act with moderation. I'm no jingo. We

must be firm without bullying. Will you come up and see my pictures?"

Moving from one to another of these treasures, he soon perceived that

they knew nothing. They passed his last Mauve, that remarkable study of

a 'Hay-cart going Home,' as if it were a lithograph. He waited almost

with awe to see how they would view the jewel of his collection--an

Israels whose price he had watched ascending till he was now almost

certain it had reached top value, and would be better on the market

again. They did not view it at all. This was a shock; and yet to have in

Annette a virgin taste to form would be better than to have the silly,

half-baked predilections of the English middle-class to deal with.

At the end of the gallery was a Meissonier of which he was rather

ashamed--Meissonier was so steadily going down. Madame Lamotte stopped

before it.

"Meissonier! Ah! What a jewel!" Soames took advantage of that moment.

Very gently touching Annette's arm, he said:

"How do you like my place, Annette?"

She did not shrink, did not respond; she looked at him full, looked

down, and murmured:

"Who would not like it? It is so beautiful!"

"Perhaps some day--" Soames said, and stopped.

So pretty she was, so self-possessed--she frightened him. Those

cornflower-blue eyes, the turn of that creamy neck, her delicate

curves--she was a standing temptation to indiscretion! No! No! One must

be sure of one's ground--much surer! 'If I hold off,' he thought, 'it

will tantalise her.' And he crossed over to Madame Lamotte, who was

still in front of the Meissonier.

"Yes, that's quite a good example of his later work. You must come

again, Madame, and see them lighted up. You must both come and spend a

night."

Enchanted, would it not be beautiful to see them lighted? By moonlight

too, the river must be ravishing!

Annette murmured:

"Thou art sentimental, Maman!"

Sentimental! That black-robed, comely, substantial Frenchwoman of the

world! And suddenly he was certain as he could be that there was no

sentiment in either of them. All the better. Of what use sentiment? And

yet...!

He drove to the station with them, and saw them into the train. To

the tightened pressure of his hand it seemed that Annette's fingers

responded just a little; her face smiled at him through the dark.

He went back to the carriage, brooding. "Go on home, Jordan," he said to

the coachman; "I'll walk." And he strode out into the darkening lanes,

caution and the desire of possession playing see-saw within him. 'Bon

soir, monsieur!' How softly she had said it. To know what was in her

mind! The French--they were like cats--one could tell nothing! But--how

pretty! What a perfect young thing to hold in one's arms! What a mother

for his heir! And he thought, with a smile, of his family and their

surprise at a French wife, and their curiosity, and of the way he would

play with it and buffet it confound them!

The poplars sighed in the darkness; an owl hooted. Shadows deepened in

the water. 'I will and must be free,' he thought. 'I won't hang about

any longer. I'll go and see Irene. If you want things done, do them

yourself. I must live again--live and move and have my being.' And in

echo to that queer biblicality church-bells chimed the call to evening

prayer.

CHAPTER XI--AND VISITS THE PAST

On a Tuesday evening after dining at his club Soames set out to do what

required more courage and perhaps less delicacy than anything he had yet

undertaken in his life--save perhaps his birth, and one other action.

He chose the evening, indeed, partly because Irene was more likely to

be in, but mainly because he had failed to find sufficient resolution by

daylight, had needed wine to give him extra daring.

He left his hansom on the Embankment, and walked up to the Old Church,

uncertain of the block of flats where he knew she lived. He found it

hiding behind a much larger mansion; and having read the name, 'Mrs.

Irene Heron'--Heron, forsooth! Her maiden name: so she used that again,

did she?--he stepped back into the road to look up at the windows of the

first floor. Light was coming through in the corner flat, and he

could hear a piano being played. He had never had a love of music, had

secretly borne it a grudge in the old days when so often she had turned

to her piano, making of it a refuge place into which she knew he could

not enter. Repulse! The long repulse, at first restrained and secret, at

last open! Bitter memory came with that sound. It must be she playing,

and thus almost assured of seeing her, he stood more undecided than

ever. Shivers of anticipation ran through him; his tongue felt dry, his

heart beat fast. 'I have no cause to be afraid,' he thought. And then

the lawyer stirred within him. Was he doing a foolish thing? Ought he

not to have arranged a formal meeting in the presence of her trustee?

No! Not before that fellow Jolyon, who sympathised with her! Never! He

crossed back into the doorway, and, slowly, to keep down the beating of

his heart, mounted the single flight of stairs and rang the bell. When

the door was opened to him his sensations were regulated by the scent

which came--that perfume--from away back in the past, bringing muffled

remembrance: fragrance of a drawing-room he used to enter, of a house he

used to own--perfume of dried rose-leaves and honey!

"Say, Mr. Forsyte," he said, "your mistress will see me, I know." He had

thought this out; she would think it was Jolyon!

When the maid was gone and he was alone in the tiny hall, where

the light was dim from one pearly-shaded sconce, and walls, carpet,

everything was silvery, making the walled-in space all ghostly, he could

only think ridiculously: 'Shall I go in with my overcoat on, or take it

off?' The music ceased; the maid said from the doorway:

"Will you walk in, sir?"

Soames walked in. He noted mechanically that all was still silvery,

and that the upright piano was of satinwood. She had risen and stood

recoiled against it; her hand, placed on the keys as if groping for

support, had struck a sudden discord, held for a moment, and released.

The light from the shaded piano-candle fell on her neck, leaving her

face rather in shadow. She was in a black evening dress, with a sort of

mantilla over her shoulders--he did not remember ever having seen her in

black, and the thought passed through him: 'She dresses even when she's

alone.'

"You!" he heard her whisper.

Many times Soames had rehearsed this scene in fancy. Rehearsal served

him not at all. He simply could not speak. He had never thought that

the sight of this woman whom he had once so passionately desired, so

completely owned, and whom he had not seen for twelve years, could

affect him in this way. He had imagined himself speaking and acting,

half as man of business, half as judge. And now it was as if he were

in the presence not of a mere woman and erring wife, but of some force,

subtle and elusive as atmosphere itself within him and outside. A kind

of defensive irony welled up in him.

"Yes, it's a queer visit! I hope you're well."

"Thank you. Will you sit down?"

She had moved away from the piano, and gone over to a window-seat,

sinking on to it, with her hands clasped in her lap. Light fell on her

there, so that Soames could see her face, eyes, hair, strangely as he

remembered them, strangely beautiful.

He sat down on the edge of a satinwood chair, upholstered with

silver-coloured stuff, close to where he was standing.

"You have not changed," he said.

"No? What have you come for?"

"To discuss things."

"I have heard what you want from your cousin."

"Well?"

"I am willing. I have always been."

The sound of her voice, reserved and close, the sight of her figure

watchfully poised, defensive, was helping him now. A thousand memories

of her, ever on the watch against him, stirred, and....

"Perhaps you will be good enough, then, to give me information on which

I can act. The law must be complied with."

"I have none to give you that you don't know of."

"Twelve years! Do you suppose I can believe that?"

"I don't suppose you will believe anything I say; but it's the truth."

Soames looked at her hard. He had said that she had not changed; now he

perceived that she had. Not in face, except that it was more beautiful;

not in form, except that it was a little fuller--no! She had changed

spiritually. There was more of her, as it were, something of activity

and daring, where there had been sheer passive resistance. 'Ah!' he

thought, 'that's her independent income! Confound Uncle Jolyon!'

"I suppose you're comfortably off now?" he said.

"Thank you, yes."

"Why didn't you let me provide for you? I would have, in spite of

everything."

A faint smile came on her lips; but she did not answer.

"You are still my wife," said Soames. Why he said that, what he meant

by it, he knew neither when he spoke nor after. It was a truism

almost preposterous, but its effect was startling. She rose from the

window-seat, and stood for a moment perfectly still, looking at him. He

could see her bosom heaving. Then she turned to the window and threw it

open.

"Why do that?" he said sharply. "You'll catch cold in that dress. I'm

not dangerous." And he uttered a little sad laugh.

She echoed it--faintly, bitterly.

"It was--habit."

"Rather odd habit," said Soames as bitterly. "Shut the window!"

She shut it and sat down again. She had developed power, this

woman--this--wife of his! He felt it issuing from her as she sat there,

in a sort of armour. And almost unconsciously he rose and moved

nearer; he wanted to see the expression on her face. Her eyes met his

unflinching. Heavens! how clear they were, and what a dark brown against

that white skin, and that burnt-amber hair! And how white her shoulders.

Funny sensation this! He ought to hate her.

"You had better tell me," he said; "it's to your advantage to be free as

well as to mine. That old matter is too old."

"I have told you."

"Do you mean to tell me there has been nothing--nobody?"

"Nobody. You must go to your own life."

Stung by that retort, Soames moved towards the piano and back to

the hearth, to and fro, as he had been wont in the old days in their

drawing-room when his feelings were too much for him.

"That won't do," he said. "You deserted me. In common justice it's for

you...."

He saw her shrug those white shoulders, heard her murmur:

"Yes. Why didn't you divorce me then? Should I have cared?"

He stopped, and looked at her intently with a sort of curiosity. What on

earth did she do with herself, if she really lived quite alone? And why

had he not divorced her? The old feeling that she had never understood

him, never done him justice, bit him while he stared at her.

"Why couldn't you have made me a good wife?" he said.

"Yes; it was a crime to marry you. I have paid for it. You will find

some way perhaps. You needn't mind my name, I have none to lose. Now I

think you had better go."

A sense of defeat--of being defrauded of his self-justification, and of

something else beyond power of explanation to himself, beset Soames

like the breath of a cold fog. Mechanically he reached up, took from the

mantel-shelf a little china bowl, reversed it, and said:

"Lowestoft. Where did you get this? I bought its fellow at Jobson's."

And, visited by the sudden memory of how, those many years ago, he and

she had bought china together, he remained staring at the little bowl,

as if it contained all the past. Her voice roused him.

"Take it. I don't want it."

Soames put it back on the shelf.

"Will you shake hands?" he said.

A faint smile curved her lips. She held out her hand. It was cold to his

rather feverish touch. 'She's made of ice,' he thought--'she was always

made of ice!' But even as that thought darted through him, his senses

were assailed by the perfume of her dress and body, as though the warmth

within her, which had never been for him, were struggling to show its

presence. And he turned on his heel. He walked out and away, as if

someone with a whip were after him, not even looking for a cab, glad of

the empty Embankment and the cold river, and the thick-strewn shadows

of the plane-tree leaves--confused, flurried, sore at heart, and vaguely

disturbed, as though he had made some deep mistake whose consequences

he could not foresee. And the fantastic thought suddenly assailed him if

instead of, 'I think you had better go,' she had said, 'I think you had

better stay!' What should he have felt, what would he have done? That

cursed attraction of her was there for him even now, after all these

years of estrangement and bitter thoughts. It was there, ready to mount

to his head at a sign, a touch. 'I was a fool to go!' he muttered. 'I've

advanced nothing. Who could imagine? I never thought!' Memory, flown

back to the first years of his marriage, played him torturing tricks.

She had not deserved to keep her beauty--the beauty he had owned and

known so well. And a kind of bitterness at the tenacity of his own

admiration welled up in him. Most men would have hated the sight of

her, as she had deserved. She had spoiled his life, wounded his pride to

death, defrauded him of a son. And yet the mere sight of her, cold and

resisting as ever, had this power to upset him utterly! It was some

damned magnetism she had! And no wonder if, as she asserted; she had

lived untouched these last twelve years. So Bosinney--cursed be his

memory!--had lived on all this time with her! Soames could not tell

whether he was glad of that knowledge or no.

Nearing his Club at last he stopped to buy a paper. A headline ran:

'Boers reported to repudiate suzerainty!' Suzerainty! 'Just like her!'

he thought: 'she always did. Suzerainty! I still have it by rights. She

must be awfully lonely in that wretched little flat!'

CHAPTER XII--ON FORSYTE 'CHANGE

Soames belonged to two clubs, 'The Connoisseurs,' which he put on his

cards and seldom visited, and 'The Remove,' which he did not put on his

cards and frequented. He had joined this Liberal institution five

years ago, having made sure that its members were now nearly all sound

Conservatives in heart and pocket, if not in principle. Uncle Nicholas

had put him up. The fine reading-room was decorated in the Adam style.

On entering that evening he glanced at the tape for any news about the

Transvaal, and noted that Consols were down seven-sixteenths since

the morning. He was turning away to seek the reading-room when a voice

behind him said:

"Well, Soames, that went off all right."

It was Uncle Nicholas, in a frock-coat and his special cut-away collar,

with a black tie passed through a ring. Heavens! How young and dapper he

looked at eighty-two!

"I think Roger'd have been pleased," his uncle went on. "The thing was

very well done. Blackley's? I'll make a note of them. Buxton's done me

no good. These Boers are upsetting me--that fellow Chamberlain's driving

the country into war. What do you think?"

"Bound to come," murmured Soames.

Nicholas passed his hand over his thin, clean-shaven cheeks, very rosy

after his summer cure; a slight pout had gathered on his lips. This

business had revived all his Liberal principles.

"I mistrust that chap; he's a stormy petrel. House-property will go down

if there's war. You'll have trouble with Roger's estate. I often told

him he ought to get out of some of his houses. He was an opinionated

beggar."

'There was a pair of you!' thought Soames. But he never argued with an

uncle, in that way preserving their opinion of him as 'a long-headed

chap,' and the legal care of their property.

"They tell me at Timothy's," said Nicholas, lowering his voice, "that

Dartie has gone off at last. That'll be a relief to your father. He was

a rotten egg."

Again Soames nodded. If there was a subject on which the Forsytes really

agreed, it was the character of Montague Dartie.

"You take care," said Nicholas, "or he'll turn up again. Winifred had

better have the tooth out, I should say. No use preserving what's gone

bad."

Soames looked at him sideways. His nerves, exacerbated by the interview

he had just come through, disposed him to see a personal allusion in

those words.

"I'm advising her," he said shortly.

"Well," said Nicholas, "the brougham's waiting; I must get home. I'm

very poorly. Remember me to your father."

And having thus reconsecrated the ties of blood, he passed down the

steps at his youthful gait and was wrapped into his fur coat by the

junior porter.

'I've never known Uncle Nicholas other than "very poorly,"' mused

Soames, 'or seen him look other than everlasting. What a family! Judging

by him, I've got thirty-eight years of health before me. Well, I'm not

going to waste them.' And going over to a mirror he stood looking at

his face. Except for a line or two, and three or four grey hairs in his

little dark moustache, had he aged any more than Irene? The prime of

life--he and she in the very prime of life! And a fantastic thought shot

into his mind. Absurd! Idiotic! But again it came. And genuinely alarmed

by the recurrence, as one is by the second fit of shivering which

presages a feverish cold, he sat down on the weighing machine. Eleven

stone! He had not varied two pounds in twenty years. What age was

she? Nearly thirty-seven--not too old to have a child--not at all!

Thirty-seven on the ninth of next month. He remembered her birthday

well--he had always observed it religiously, even that last birthday so

soon before she left him, when he was almost certain she was faithless.

Four birthdays in his house. He had looked forward to them, because his

gifts had meant a semblance of gratitude, a certain attempt at warmth.

Except, indeed, that last birthday--which had tempted him to be too

religious! And he shied away in thought. Memory heaps dead leaves on

corpse-like deeds, from under which they do but vaguely offend the

sense. And then he thought suddenly: 'I could send her a present for her

birthday. After all, we're Christians! Couldn't!--couldn't we join

up again!' And he uttered a deep sigh sitting there. Annette! Ah! but

between him and Annette was the need for that wretched divorce suit! And

how?

"A man can always work these things, if he'll take it on himself,"

Jolyon had said.

But why should he take the scandal on himself with his whole career as

a pillar of the law at stake? It was not fair! It was quixotic! Twelve

years' separation in which he had taken no steps to free himself put out

of court the possibility of using her conduct with Bosinney as a ground

for divorcing her. By doing nothing to secure relief he had acquiesced,

even if the evidence could now be gathered, which was more than

doubtful. Besides, his own pride would never let him use that old

incident, he had suffered from it too much. No! Nothing but fresh

misconduct on her part--but she had denied it; and--almost--he had

believed her. Hung up! Utterly hung up!

He rose from the scooped-out red velvet seat with a feeling of

constriction about his vitals. He would never sleep with this going on

in him! And, taking coat and hat again, he went out, moving eastward.

In Trafalgar Square he became aware of some special commotion travelling

towards him out of the mouth of the Strand. It materialised in newspaper

men calling out so loudly that no words whatever could be heard. He

stopped to listen, and one came by.

"Payper! Special! Ultimatium by Krooger! Declaration of war!" Soames

bought the paper. There it was in the stop press...! His first thought

was: 'The Boers are committing suicide.' His second: 'Is there anything

still I ought to sell?' If so he had missed the chance--there would

certainly be a slump in the city to-morrow. He swallowed this thought

with a nod of defiance. That ultimatum was insolent--sooner than let it

pass he was prepared to lose money. They wanted a lesson, and they would

get it; but it would take three months at least to bring them to heel.

There weren't the troops out there; always behind time, the Government!

Confound those newspaper rats! What was the use of waking everybody up?

Breakfast to-morrow was quite soon enough. And he thought with alarm of

his father. They would cry it down Park Lane. Hailing a hansom, he got

in and told the man to drive there.

James and Emily had just gone up to bed, and after communicating the

news to Warmson, Soames prepared to follow. He paused by after-thought

to say:

"What do you think of it, Warmson?"

The butler ceased passing a hat brush over the silk hat Soames had taken

off, and, inclining his face a little forward, said in a low voice:

"Well, sir, they 'aven't a chance, of course; but I'm told they're very

good shots. I've got a son in the Inniskillings."

"You, Warmson? Why, I didn't know you were married."

"No, sir. I don't talk of it. I expect he'll be going out."

The slighter shock Soames had felt on discovering that he knew so little

of one whom he thought he knew so well was lost in the slight shock of

discovering that the war might touch one personally. Born in the year

of the Crimean War, he had only come to consciousness by the time the

Indian Mutiny was over; since then the many little wars of the British

Empire had been entirely professional, quite unconnected with the

Forsytes and all they stood for in the body politic. This war would

surely be no exception. But his mind ran hastily over his family. Two of

the Haymans, he had heard, were in some Yeomanry or other--it had always

been a pleasant thought, there was a certain distinction about the

Yeomanry; they wore, or used to wear, a blue uniform with silver about

it, and rode horses. And Archibald, he remembered, had once on a time

joined the Militia, but had given it up because his father, Nicholas,

had made such a fuss about his 'wasting his time peacocking about in a

uniform.' Recently he had heard somewhere that young Nicholas' eldest,

very young Nicholas, had become a Volunteer. 'No,' thought Soames,

mounting the stairs slowly, 'there's nothing in that!'

He stood on the landing outside his parents' bed and dressing rooms,

debating whether or not to put his nose in and say a reassuring word.

Opening the landing window, he listened. The rumble from Piccadilly

was all the sound he heard, and with the thought, 'If these motor-cars

increase, it'll affect house property,' he was about to pass on up to

the room always kept ready for him when he heard, distant as yet, the

hoarse rushing call of a newsvendor. There it was, and coming past the

house! He knocked on his mother's door and went in.

His father was sitting up in bed, with his ears pricked under the

white hair which Emily kept so beautifully cut. He looked pink, and

extraordinarily clean, in his setting of white sheet and pillow, out

of which the points of his high, thin, nightgowned shoulders emerged in

small peaks. His eyes alone, grey and distrustful under their withered

lids, were moving from the window to Emily, who in a wrapper was walking

up and down, squeezing a rubber ball attached to a scent bottle. The

room reeked faintly of the eau-de-Cologne she was spraying.

"All right!" said Soames, "it's not a fire. The Boers have declared

war--that's all."

Emily stopped her spraying.

"Oh!" was all she said, and looked at James.

Soames, too, looked at his father. He was taking it differently from

their expectation, as if some thought, strange to them, were working in

him.

"H'm!" he muttered suddenly, "I shan't live to see the end of this."

"Nonsense, James! It'll be over by Christmas."

"What do you know about it?" James answered her with asperity. "It's a

pretty mess at this time of night, too!" He lapsed into silence, and his

wife and son, as if hypnotised, waited for him to say: 'I can't tell--I

don't know; I knew how it would be!' But he did not. The grey eyes

shifted, evidently seeing nothing in the room; then movement occurred

under the bedclothes, and the knees were drawn up suddenly to a great

height.

"They ought to send out Roberts. It all comes from that fellow Gladstone

and his Majuba."

The two listeners noted something beyond the usual in his voice,

something of real anxiety. It was as if he had said: 'I shall never see

the old country peaceful and safe again. I shall have to die before

I know she's won.' And in spite of the feeling that James must not be

encouraged to be fussy, they were touched. Soames went up to the

bedside and stroked his father's hand which had emerged from under the

bedclothes, long and wrinkled with veins.

"Mark my words!" said James, "consols will go to par. For all I know,

Val may go and enlist."

"Oh, come, James!" cried Emily, "you talk as if there were danger."

Her comfortable voice seemed to soothe James for once.

"Well," he muttered, "I told you how it would be. I don't know, I'm

sure--nobody tells me anything. Are you sleeping here, my boy?"

The crisis was past, he would now compose himself to his normal degree

of anxiety; and, assuring his father that he was sleeping in the house,

Soames pressed his hand, and went up to his room.

The following afternoon witnessed the greatest crowd Timothy's had known

for many a year. On national occasions, such as this, it was, indeed,

almost impossible to avoid going there. Not that there was any danger or

rather only just enough to make it necessary to assure each other that

there was none.

Nicholas was there early. He had seen Soames the night before--Soames

had said it was bound to come. This old Kruger was in his dotage--why,

he must be seventy-five if he was a day!

(Nicholas was eighty-two.) What had Timothy said? He had had a fit after

Majuba. These Boers were a grasping lot! The dark-haired Francie, who

had arrived on his heels, with the contradictious touch which became the

free spirit of a daughter of Roger, chimed in:

"Kettle and pot, Uncle Nicholas. What price the Uitlanders?" What price,

indeed! A new expression, and believed to be due to her brother George.

Aunt Juley thought Francie ought not to say such a thing. Dear Mrs.

MacAnder's boy, Charlie MacAnder, was one, and no one could call him

grasping. At this Francie uttered one of her mots, scandalising, and so

frequently repeated:

"Well, his father's a Scotchman, and his mother's a cat."

Aunt Juley covered her ears, too late, but Aunt Hester smiled; as for

Nicholas, he pouted--witticism of which he was not the author was

hardly to his taste. Just then Marian Tweetyman arrived, followed almost

immediately by young Nicholas. On seeing his son, Nicholas rose.

"Well, I must be going," he said, "Nick here will tell you what'll

win the race." And with this hit at his eldest, who, as a pillar of

accountancy, and director of an insurance company, was no more addicted

to sport than his father had ever been, he departed. Dear Nicholas! What

race was that? Or was it only one of his jokes? He was a wonderful man

for his age! How many lumps would dear Marian take? And how were Giles

and Jesse? Aunt Juley supposed their Yeomanry would be very busy now,

guarding the coast, though of course the Boers had no ships. But one

never knew what the French might do if they had the chance, especially

since that dreadful Fashoda scare, which had upset Timothy so terribly

that he had made no investments for months afterwards. It was the

ingratitude of the Boers that was so dreadful, after everything had been

done for them--Dr. Jameson imprisoned, and he was so nice, Mrs. MacAnder

had always said. And Sir Alfred Milner sent out to talk to them--such a

clever man! She didn't know what they wanted.

But at this moment occurred one of those sensations--so precious at

Timothy's--which great occasions sometimes bring forth:

"Miss June Forsyte."

Aunts Juley and Hester were on their feet at once, trembling from

smothered resentment, and old affection bubbling up, and pride at the

return of a prodigal June! Well, this was a surprise! Dear June--after

all these years! And how well she was looking! Not changed at all! It

was almost on their lips to add, 'And how is your dear grandfather?'

forgetting in that giddy moment that poor dear Jolyon had been in his

grave for seven years now.

Ever the most courageous and downright of all the Forsytes, June, with

her decided chin and her spirited eyes and her hair like flame, sat

down, slight and short, on a gilt chair with a bead-worked seat, for

all the world as if ten years had not elapsed since she had been to see

them--ten years of travel and independence and devotion to lame ducks.

Those ducks of late had been all definitely painters, etchers, or

sculptors, so that her impatience with the Forsytes and their hopelessly

inartistic outlook had become intense. Indeed, she had almost ceased to

believe that her family existed, and looked round her now with a sort

of challenging directness which brought exquisite discomfort to the

roomful. She had not expected to meet any of them but 'the poor old

things'; and why she had come to see them she hardly knew, except that,

while on her way from Oxford Street to a studio in Latimer Road, she had

suddenly remembered them with compunction as two long-neglected old lame

ducks.

Aunt Juley broke the hush again. "We've just been saying, dear, how

dreadful it is about these Boers! And what an impudent thing of that old

Kruger!"

"Impudent!" said June. "I think he's quite right. What business have we

to meddle with them? If he turned out all those wretched Uitlanders it

would serve them right. They're only after money."

The silence of sensation was broken by Francie saying:

"What? Are you a pro-Boer?" (undoubtedly the first use of that

expression).

"Well! Why can't we leave them alone?" said June, just as, in the open

doorway, the maid said "Mr. Soames Forsyte." Sensation on sensation!

Greeting was almost held up by curiosity to see how June and he would

take this encounter, for it was shrewdly suspected, if not quite known,

that they had not met since that old and lamentable affair of her fiance

Bosinney with Soames' wife. They were seen to just touch each other's

hands, and look each at the other's left eye only. Aunt Juley came at

once to the rescue:

"Dear June is so original. Fancy, Soames, she thinks the Boers are not

to blame."

"They only want their independence," said June; "and why shouldn't they

have it?"

"Because," answered Soames, with his smile a little on one side, "they

happen to have agreed to our suzerainty."

"Suzerainty!" repeated June scornfully; "we shouldn't like anyone's

suzerainty over us."

"They got advantages in payment," replied Soames; "a contract is a

contract."

"Contracts are not always just," fumed out June, "and when they're not,

they ought to be broken. The Boers are much the weaker. We could afford

to be generous."

Soames sniffed. "That's mere sentiment," he said.

Aunt Hester, to whom nothing was more awful than any kind of

disagreement, here leaned forward and remarked decisively:

"What lovely weather it has been for the time of year?"

But June was not to be diverted.

"I don't know why sentiment should be sneered at. It's the best thing in

the world." She looked defiantly round, and Aunt Juley had to intervene

again:

"Have you bought any pictures lately, Soames?"

Her incomparable instinct for the wrong subject had not failed her.

Soames flushed. To disclose the name of his latest purchases would be

like walking into the jaws of disdain. For somehow they all knew of

June's predilection for 'genius' not yet on its legs, and her contempt

for 'success' unless she had had a finger in securing it.

"One or two," he muttered.

But June's face had changed; the Forsyte within her was seeing

its chance. Why should not Soames buy some of the pictures of Eric

Cobbley--her last lame duck? And she promptly opened her attack: Did

Soames know his work? It was so wonderful. He was the coming man.

Oh, yes, Soames knew his work. It was in his view 'splashy,' and would

never get hold of the public.

June blazed up.

"Of course it won't; that's the last thing one would wish for. I thought

you were a connoisseur, not a picture-dealer."

"Of course Soames is a connoisseur," Aunt Juley said hastily; "he

has wonderful taste--he can always tell beforehand what's going to be

successful."

"Oh!" gasped June, and sprang up from the bead-covered chair, "I hate

that standard of success. Why can't people buy things because they like

them?"

"You mean," said Francie, "because you like them."

And in the slight pause young Nicholas was heard saying gently that

Violet (his fourth) was taking lessons in pastel, he didn't know if they

were any use.

"Well, good-bye, Auntie," said June; "I must get on," and kissing her

aunts, she looked defiantly round the room, said "Good-bye" again, and

went. A breeze seemed to pass out with her, as if everyone had sighed.

The third sensation came before anyone had time to speak:

"Mr. James Forsyte."

James came in using a stick slightly and wrapped in a fur coat which

gave him a fictitious bulk.

Everyone stood up. James was so old; and he had not been at Timothy's

for nearly two years.

"It's hot in here," he said.

Soames divested him of his coat, and as he did so could not help

admiring the glossy way his father was turned out. James sat down, all

knees, elbows, frock-coat, and long white whiskers.

"What's the meaning of that?" he said.

Though there was no apparent sense in his words, they all knew that he

was referring to June. His eyes searched his son's face.

"I thought I'd come and see for myself. What have they answered Kruger?"

Soames took out an evening paper, and read the headline.

"'Instant action by our Government--state of war existing!'"

"Ah!" said James, and sighed. "I was afraid they'd cut and run like old

Gladstone. We shall finish with them this time."

All stared at him. James! Always fussy, nervous, anxious! James with

his continual, 'I told you how it would be!' and his pessimism, and his

cautious investments. There was something uncanny about such resolution

in this the oldest living Forsyte.

"Where's Timothy?" said James. "He ought to pay attention to this."

Aunt Juley said she didn't know; Timothy had not said much at lunch

to-day. Aunt Hester rose and threaded her way out of the room, and

Francie said rather maliciously:

"The Boers are a hard nut to crack, Uncle James."

"H'm!" muttered James. "Where do you get your information? Nobody tells

me."

Young Nicholas remarked in his mild voice that Nick (his eldest) was now

going to drill regularly.

"Ah!" muttered James, and stared before him--his thoughts were on Val.

"He's got to look after his mother," he said, "he's got no time for

drilling and that, with that father of his." This cryptic saying

produced silence, until he spoke again.

"What did June want here?" And his eyes rested with suspicion on all of

them in turn. "Her father's a rich man now." The conversation turned

on Jolyon, and when he had been seen last. It was supposed that he

went abroad and saw all sorts of people now that his wife was dead; his

water-colours were on the line, and he was a successful man. Francie

went so far as to say:

"I should like to see him again; he was rather a dear."

Aunt Juley recalled how he had gone to sleep on the sofa one day, where

James was sitting. He had always been very amiable; what did Soames

think?

Knowing that Jolyon was Irene's trustee, all felt the delicacy of this

question, and looked at Soames with interest. A faint pink had come up

in his cheeks.

"He's going grey," he said.

Indeed! Had Soames seen him? Soames nodded, and the pink vanished.

James said suddenly: "Well--I don't know, I can't tell."

It so exactly expressed the sentiment of everybody present that there

was something behind everything, that nobody responded. But at this

moment Aunt Hester returned.

"Timothy," she said in a low voice, "Timothy has bought a map, and he's

put in--he's put in three flags."

Timothy had...! A sigh went round the company.

If Timothy had indeed put in three flags already, well!--it showed what

the nation could do when it was roused. The war was as good as over.

CHAPTER XIII--JOLYON FINDS OUT WHERE HE IS

Jolyon stood at the window in Holly's old night nursery, converted into

a studio, not because it had a north light, but for its view over the

prospect away to the Grand Stand at Epsom. He shifted to the side window

which overlooked the stableyard, and whistled down to the dog Balthasar

who lay for ever under the clock tower. The old dog looked up and wagged

his tail. 'Poor old boy!' thought Jolyon, shifting back to the other

window.

He had been restless all this week, since his attempt to prosecute

trusteeship, uneasy in his conscience which was ever acute, disturbed

in his sense of compassion which was easily excited, and with a queer

sensation as if his feeling for beauty had received some definite

embodiment. Autumn was getting hold of the old oak-tree, its leaves

were browning. Sunshine had been plentiful and hot this summer. As with

trees, so with men's lives! 'I ought to live long,' thought Jolyon; 'I'm

getting mildewed for want of heat. If I can't work, I shall be off to

Paris.' But memory of Paris gave him no pleasure. Besides, how could he

go? He must stay and see what Soames was going to do. 'I'm her trustee.

I can't leave her unprotected,' he thought. It had been striking him

as curious how very clearly he could still see Irene in her little

drawing-room which he had only twice entered. Her beauty must have a

sort of poignant harmony! No literal portrait would ever do her justice;

the essence of her was--ah I what?... The noise of hoofs called him back

to the other window. Holly was riding into the yard on her long-tailed

'palfrey.' She looked up and he waved to her. She had been rather silent

lately; getting old, he supposed, beginning to want her future, as they

all did--youngsters!

Time was certainly the devil! And with the feeling that to waste this

swift-travelling commodity was unforgivable folly, he took up his brush.

But it was no use; he could not concentrate his eye--besides, the light

was going. 'I'll go up to town,' he thought. In the hall a servant met

him.

"A lady to see you, sir; Mrs. Heron."

Extraordinary coincidence! Passing into the picture-gallery, as it was

still called, he saw Irene standing over by the window.

She came towards him saying:

"I've been trespassing; I came up through the coppice and garden. I

always used to come that way to see Uncle Jolyon."

"You couldn't trespass here," replied Jolyon; "history makes that

impossible. I was just thinking of you."

Irene smiled. And it was as if something shone through; not mere

spirituality--serener, completer, more alluring.

"History!" she answered; "I once told Uncle Jolyon that love was for

ever. Well, it isn't. Only aversion lasts."

Jolyon stared at her. Had she got over Bosinney at last?

"Yes!" he said, "aversion's deeper than love or hate because it's a

natural product of the nerves, and we don't change them."

"I came to tell you that Soames has been to see me. He said a thing that

frightened me. He said: 'You are still my wife!'"

"What!" ejaculated Jolyon. "You ought not to live alone." And he

continued to stare at her, afflicted by the thought that where Beauty

was, nothing ever ran quite straight, which, no doubt, was why so many

people looked on it as immoral.

"What more?"

"He asked me to shake hands.

"Did you?"

"Yes. When he came in I'm sure he didn't want to; he changed while he

was there."

"Ah! you certainly ought not to go on living there alone."

"I know no woman I could ask; and I can't take a lover to order, Cousin

Jolyon."

"Heaven forbid!" said Jolyon. "What a damnable position! Will you stay

to dinner? No? Well, let me see you back to town; I wanted to go up this

evening."

"Truly?"

"Truly. I'll be ready in five minutes."

On that walk to the station they talked of pictures and music,

contrasting the English and French characters and the difference in

their attitude to Art. But to Jolyon the colours in the hedges of the

long straight lane, the twittering of chaffinches who kept pace with

them, the perfume of weeds being already burned, the turn of her neck,

the fascination of those dark eyes bent on him now and then, the lure

of her whole figure, made a deeper impression than the remarks they

exchanged. Unconsciously he held himself straighter, walked with a more

elastic step.

In the train he put her through a sort of catechism as to what she did

with her days.

Made her dresses, shopped, visited a hospital, played her piano,

translated from the French.

She had regular work from a publisher, it seemed, which supplemented her

income a little. She seldom went out in the evening. "I've been living

alone so long, you see, that I don't mind it a bit. I believe I'm

naturally solitary."

"I don't believe that," said Jolyon. "Do you know many people?"

"Very few."

At Waterloo they took a hansom, and he drove with her to the door of her

mansions. Squeezing her hand at parting, he said:

"You know, you could always come to us at Robin Hill; you must let me

know everything that happens. Good-bye, Irene."

"Good-bye," she answered softly.

Jolyon climbed back into his cab, wondering why he had not asked her

to dine and go to the theatre with him. Solitary, starved, hung-up life

that she had! "Hotch Potch Club," he said through the trap-door. As his

hansom debouched on to the Embankment, a man in top-hat and overcoat

passed, walking quickly, so close to the wall that he seemed to be

scraping it.

'By Jove!' thought Jolyon; 'Soames himself! What's he up to now?' And,

stopping the cab round the corner, he got out and retraced his steps to

where he could see the entrance to the mansions. Soames had halted in

front of them, and was looking up at the light in her windows. 'If he

goes in,' thought Jolyon, 'what shall I do? What have I the right

to do?' What the fellow had said was true. She was still his wife,

absolutely without protection from annoyance! 'Well, if he goes in,'

he thought, 'I follow.' And he began moving towards the mansions.

Again Soames advanced; he was in the very entrance now. But suddenly he

stopped, spun round on his heel, and came back towards the river. 'What

now?' thought Jolyon. 'In a dozen steps he'll recognise me.' And he

turned tail. His cousin's footsteps kept pace with his own. But he

reached his cab, and got in before Soames had turned the corner. "Go

on!" he said through the trap. Soames' figure ranged up alongside.

"Hansom!" he said. "Engaged? Hallo!"

"Hallo!" answered Jolyon. "You?"

The quick suspicion on his cousin's face, white in the lamplight,

decided him.

"I can give you a lift," he said, "if you're going West."

"Thanks," answered Soames, and got in.

"I've been seeing Irene," said Jolyon when the cab had started.

"Indeed!"

"You went to see her yesterday yourself, I understand."

"I did," said Soames; "she's my wife, you know."

The tone, the half-lifted sneering lip, roused sudden anger in Jolyon;

but he subdued it.

"You ought to know best," he said, "but if you want a divorce it's not

very wise to go seeing her, is it? One can't run with the hare and hunt

with the hounds?"

"You're very good to warn me," said Soames, "but I have not made up my

mind."

"She has," said Jolyon, looking straight before him; "you can't take

things up, you know, as they were twelve years ago."

"That remains to be seen."

"Look here!" said Jolyon, "she's in a damnable position, and I am the

only person with any legal say in her affairs."

"Except myself," retorted Soames, "who am also in a damnable position.

Hers is what she made for herself; mine what she made for me. I am not

at all sure that in her own interests I shan't require her to return to

me."

"What!" exclaimed Jolyon; and a shiver went through his whole body.

"I don't know what you may mean by 'what,'" answered Soames coldly;

"your say in her affairs is confined to paying out her income; please

bear that in mind. In choosing not to disgrace her by a divorce, I

retained my rights, and, as I say, I am not at all sure that I shan't

require to exercise them."

"My God!" ejaculated Jolyon, and he uttered a short laugh.

"Yes," said Soames, and there was a deadly quality in his voice. "I've

not forgotten the nickname your father gave me, 'The man of property'!

I'm not called names for nothing."

"This is fantastic," murmured Jolyon. Well, the fellow couldn't force

his wife to live with him. Those days were past, anyway! And he looked

around at Soames with the thought: 'Is he real, this man?' But Soames

looked very real, sitting square yet almost elegant with the clipped

moustache on his pale face, and a tooth showing where a lip was lifted

in a fixed smile. There was a long silence, while Jolyon thought:

'Instead of helping her, I've made things worse.' Suddenly Soames said:

"It would be the best thing that could happen to her in many ways."

At those words such a turmoil began taking place in Jolyon that he could

barely sit still in the cab. It was as if he were boxed up with hundreds

of thousands of his countrymen, boxed up with that something in the

national character which had always been to him revolting, something

which he knew to be extremely natural and yet which seemed to him

inexplicable--their intense belief in contracts and vested rights, their

complacent sense of virtue in the exaction of those rights. Here beside

him in the cab was the very embodiment, the corporeal sum as it were,

of the possessive instinct--his own kinsman, too! It was uncanny and

intolerable! 'But there's something more in it than that!' he thought

with a sick feeling. 'The dog, they say, returns to his vomit! The sight

of her has reawakened something. Beauty! The devil's in it!'

"As I say," said Soames, "I have not made up my mind. I shall be obliged

if you will kindly leave her quite alone."

Jolyon bit his lips; he who had always hated rows almost welcomed the

thought of one now.

"I can give you no such promise," he said shortly.

"Very well," said Soames, "then we know where we are. I'll get down

here." And stopping the cab he got out without word or sign of farewell.

Jolyon travelled on to his Club.

The first news of the war was being called in the streets, but he paid

no attention. What could he do to help her? If only his father were

alive! He could have done so much! But why could he not do all that his

father could have done? Was he not old enough?--turned fifty and twice

married, with grown-up daughters and a son. 'Queer,' he thought. 'If she

were plain I shouldn't be thinking twice about it. Beauty is the devil,

when you're sensitive to it!' And into the Club reading-room he went

with a disturbed heart. In that very room he and Bosinney had talked one

summer afternoon; he well remembered even now the disguised and secret

lecture he had given that young man in the interests of June, the

diagnosis of the Forsytes he had hazarded; and how he had wondered what

sort of woman it was he was warning him against. And now! He was almost

in want of a warning himself. 'It's deuced funny!' he thought, 'really

deuced funny!'

CHAPTER XIV--SOAMES DISCOVERS WHAT HE WANTS

It is so much easier to say, "Then we know where we are," than to mean

anything particular by the words. And in saying them Soames did but vent

the jealous rankling of his instincts. He got out of the cab in a state

of wary anger--with himself for not having seen Irene, with Jolyon for

having seen her; and now with his inability to tell exactly what he

wanted.

He had abandoned the cab because he could not bear to remain seated

beside his cousin, and walking briskly eastwards he thought: 'I wouldn't

trust that fellow Jolyon a yard. Once outcast, always outcast!' The chap

had a natural sympathy with--with--laxity (he had shied at the word sin,

because it was too melodramatic for use by a Forsyte).

Indecision in desire was to him a new feeling. He was like a child

between a promised toy and an old one which had been taken away from

him; and he was astonished at himself. Only last Sunday desire had

seemed simple--just his freedom and Annette. 'I'll go and dine there,'

he thought. To see her might bring back his singleness of intention,

calm his exasperation, clear his mind.

The restaurant was fairly full--a good many foreigners and folk whom,

from their appearance, he took to be literary or artistic. Scraps of

conversation came his way through the clatter of plates and glasses.

He distinctly heard the Boers sympathised with, the British Government

blamed. 'Don't think much of their clientele,' he thought. He went

stolidly through his dinner and special coffee without making his

presence known, and when at last he had finished, was careful not to

be seen going towards the sanctum of Madame Lamotte. They were, as he

entered, having supper--such a much nicer-looking supper than the dinner

he had eaten that he felt a kind of grief--and they greeted him with a

surprise so seemingly genuine that he thought with sudden suspicion:

'I believe they knew I was here all the time.' He gave Annette a look

furtive and searching. So pretty, seemingly so candid; could she be

angling for him? He turned to Madame Lamotte and said:

"I've been dining here."

Really! If she had only known! There were dishes she could have

recommended; what a pity! Soames was confirmed in his suspicion. 'I must

look out what I'm doing!' he thought sharply.

"Another little cup of very special coffee, monsieur; a liqueur, Grand

Marnier?" and Madame Lamotte rose to order these delicacies.

Alone with Annette Soames said, "Well, Annette?" with a defensive little

smile about his lips.

The girl blushed. This, which last Sunday would have set his nerves

tingling, now gave him much the same feeling a man has when a dog that

he owns wriggles and looks at him. He had a curious sense of power, as

if he could have said to her, 'Come and kiss me,' and she would have

come. And yet--it was strange--but there seemed another face and form in

the room too; and the itch in his nerves, was it for that--or for this?

He jerked his head towards the restaurant and said: "You have some queer

customers. Do you like this life?"

Annette looked up at him for a moment, looked down, and played with her

fork.

"No," she said, "I do not like it."

'I've got her,' thought Soames, 'if I want her. But do I want her?' She

was graceful, she was pretty--very pretty; she was fresh, she had taste

of a kind. His eyes travelled round the little room; but the eyes of his

mind went another journey--a half-light, and silvery walls, a satinwood

piano, a woman standing against it, reined back as it were from him--a

woman with white shoulders that he knew, and dark eyes that he had

sought to know, and hair like dull dark amber. And as in an artist who

strives for the unrealisable and is ever thirsty, so there rose in him

at that moment the thirst of the old passion he had never satisfied.

"Well," he said calmly, "you're young. There's everything before you."

Annette shook her head.

"I think sometimes there is nothing before me but hard work. I am not so

in love with work as mother."

"Your mother is a wonder," said Soames, faintly mocking; "she will never

let failure lodge in her house."

Annette sighed. "It must be wonderful to be rich."

"Oh! You'll be rich some day," answered Soames, still with that faint

mockery; "don't be afraid."

Annette shrugged her shoulders. "Monsieur is very kind." And between her

pouting lips she put a chocolate.

'Yes, my dear,' thought Soames, 'they're very pretty.'

Madame Lamotte, with coffee and liqueur, put an end to that colloquy.

Soames did not stay long.

Outside in the streets of Soho, which always gave him such a feeling of

property improperly owned, he mused. If only Irene had given him a son,

he wouldn't now be squirming after women! The thought had jumped out of

its little dark sentry-box in his inner consciousness. A son--something

to look forward to, something to make the rest of life worth while,

something to leave himself to, some perpetuity of self. 'If I had a

son,' he thought bitterly, 'a proper legal son, I could make shift to go

on as I used. One woman's much the same as another, after all.' But as

he walked he shook his head. No! One woman was not the same as another.

Many a time had he tried to think that in the old days of his thwarted

married life; and he had always failed. He was failing now. He was

trying to think Annette the same as that other. But she was not, she had

not the lure of that old passion. 'And Irene's my wife,' he thought, 'my

legal wife. I have done nothing to put her away from me. Why shouldn't

she come back to me? It's the right thing, the lawful thing. It makes no

scandal, no disturbance. If it's disagreeable to her--but why should it

be? I'm not a leper, and she--she's no longer in love!' Why should he

be put to the shifts and the sordid disgraces and the lurking defeats of

the Divorce Court, when there she was like an empty house only waiting

to be retaken into use and possession by him who legally owned her? To

one so secretive as Soames the thought of reentry into quiet possession

of his own property with nothing given away to the world was intensely

alluring. 'No,' he mused, 'I'm glad I went to see that girl. I know now

what I want most. If only Irene will come back I'll be as considerate as

she wishes; she could live her own life; but perhaps--perhaps she would

come round to me.' There was a lump in his throat. And doggedly along

by the railings of the Green Park, towards his father's house, he

went, trying to tread on his shadow walking before him in the brilliant

moonlight.

PART II

CHAPTER I--THE THIRD GENERATION

Jolly Forsyte was strolling down High Street, Oxford, on a November

afternoon; Val Dartie was strolling up. Jolly had just changed out of

boating flannels and was on his way to the 'Frying-pan,' to which he had

recently been elected. Val had just changed out of riding clothes and

was on his way to the fire--a bookmaker's in Cornmarket.

"Hallo!" said Jolly.

"Hallo!" replied Val.

The cousins had met but twice, Jolly, the second-year man, having

invited the freshman to breakfast; and last evening they had seen each

other again under somewhat exotic circumstances.

Over a tailor's in the Cornmarket resided one of those privileged young

beings called minors, whose inheritances are large, whose parents are

dead, whose guardians are remote, and whose instincts are vicious.

At nineteen he had commenced one of those careers attractive and

inexplicable to ordinary mortals for whom a single bankruptcy is good

as a feast. Already famous for having the only roulette table then to

be found in Oxford, he was anticipating his expectations at a dazzling

rate. He out-crummed Crum, though of a sanguine and rather beefy type

which lacked the latter's fascinating languor. For Val it had been in

the nature of baptism to be taken there to play roulette; in the nature

of confirmation to get back into college, after hours, through a

window whose bars were deceptive. Once, during that evening of delight,

glancing up from the seductive green before him, he had caught sight,

through a cloud of smoke, of his cousin standing opposite. 'Rouge gagne,

impair, et manque!' He had not seen him again.

"Come in to the Frying-pan and have tea," said Jolly, and they went in.

A stranger, seeing them together, would have noticed an unseizable

resemblance between these second cousins of the third generations of

Forsytes; the same bone formation in face, though Jolly's eyes were

darker grey, his hair lighter and more wavy.

"Tea and buttered buns, waiter, please," said Jolly.

"Have one of my cigarettes?" said Val. "I saw you last night. How did

you do?"

"I didn't play."

"I won fifteen quid."

Though desirous of repeating a whimsical comment on gambling he had once

heard his father make--'When you're fleeced you're sick, and when you

fleece you're sorry--Jolly contented himself with:

"Rotten game, I think; I was at school with that chap. He's an awful

fool."

"Oh! I don't know," said Val, as one might speak in defence of a

disparaged god; "he's a pretty good sport."

They exchanged whiffs in silence.

"You met my people, didn't you?" said Jolly. "They're coming up

to-morrow."

Val grew a little red.

"Really! I can give you a rare good tip for the Manchester November

handicap."

"Thanks, I only take interest in the classic races."

"You can't make any money over them," said Val.

"I hate the ring," said Jolly; "there's such a row and stink. I like the

paddock."

"I like to back my judgment,"' answered Val.

Jolly smiled; his smile was like his father's.

"I haven't got any. I always lose money if I bet."

"You have to buy experience, of course."

"Yes, but it's all messed-up with doing people in the eye."

"Of course, or they'll do you--that's the excitement."

Jolly looked a little scornful.

"What do you do with yourself? Row?"

"No--ride, and drive about. I'm going to play polo next term, if I can

get my granddad to stump up."

"That's old Uncle James, isn't it? What's he like?"

"Older than forty hills," said Val, "and always thinking he's going to

be ruined."

"I suppose my granddad and he were brothers."

"I don't believe any of that old lot were sportsmen," said Val; "they

must have worshipped money."

"Mine didn't!" said Jolly warmly.

Val flipped the ash off his cigarette.

"Money's only fit to spend," he said; "I wish the deuce I had more."

Jolly gave him that direct upward look of judgment which he had

inherited from old Jolyon: One didn't talk about money! And again there

was silence, while they drank tea and ate the buttered buns.

"Where are your people going to stay?" asked Val, elaborately casual.

"'Rainbow.' What do you think of the war?"

"Rotten, so far. The Boers aren't sports a bit. Why don't they come out

into the open?"

"Why should they? They've got everything against them except their way

of fighting. I rather admire them."

"They can ride and shoot," admitted Val, "but they're a lousy lot. Do

you know Crum?"

"Of Merton? Only by sight. He's in that fast set too, isn't he? Rather

La-di-da and Brummagem."

Val said fixedly: "He's a friend of mine."

"Oh! Sorry!" And they sat awkwardly staring past each other, having

pitched on their pet points of snobbery. For Jolly was forming himself

unconsciously on a set whose motto was:

'We defy you to bore us. Life isn't half long enough, and we're going to

talk faster and more crisply, do more and know more, and dwell less on

any subject than you can possibly imagine. We are "the best"--made of

wire and whipcord.' And Val was unconsciously forming himself on a set

whose motto was: 'We defy you to interest or excite us. We have had

every sensation, or if we haven't, we pretend we have. We are so

exhausted with living that no hours are too small for us. We will lose

our shirts with equanimity. We have flown fast and are past everything.

All is cigarette smoke. Bismillah!' Competitive spirit, bone-deep in the

English, was obliging those two young Forsytes to have ideals; and at

the close of a century ideals are mixed. The aristocracy had already in

the main adopted the 'jumping-Jesus' principle; though here and there

one like Crum--who was an 'honourable'--stood starkly languid for that

gambler's Nirvana which had been the summum bonum of the old 'dandies'

and of 'the mashers' in the eighties. And round Crum were still gathered

a forlorn hope of blue-bloods with a plutocratic following.

But there was between the cousins another far less obvious

antipathy--coming from the unseizable family resemblance, which each

perhaps resented; or from some half-consciousness of that old feud

persisting still between their branches of the clan, formed within them

by odd words or half-hints dropped by their elders. And Jolly, tinkling

his teaspoon, was musing: 'His tie-pin and his waistcoat and his drawl

and his betting--good Lord!'

And Val, finishing his bun, was thinking: 'He's rather a young beast!'

"I suppose you'll be meeting your people?" he said, getting up. "I wish

you'd tell them I should like to show them over B.N.C.--not that there's

anything much there--if they'd care to come."

"Thanks, I'll ask them."

"Would they lunch? I've got rather a decent scout."

Jolly doubted if they would have time.

"You'll ask them, though?"

"Very good of you," said Jolly, fully meaning that they should not go;

but, instinctively polite, he added: "You'd better come and have dinner

with us to-morrow."

"Rather. What time?"

"Seven-thirty."

"Dress?"

"No." And they parted, a subtle antagonism alive within them.

Holly and her father arrived by a midday train. It was her first visit

to the city of spires and dreams, and she was very silent, looking

almost shyly at the brother who was part of this wonderful place. After

lunch she wandered, examining his household gods with intense curiosity.

Jolly's sitting-room was panelled, and Art represented by a set of

Bartolozzi prints which had belonged to old Jolyon, and by college

photographs--of young men, live young men, a little heroic, and to be

compared with her memories of Val. Jolyon also scrutinised with care

that evidence of his boy's character and tastes.

Jolly was anxious that they should see him rowing, so they set forth to

the river. Holly, between her brother and her father, felt elated when

heads were turned and eyes rested on her. That they might see him to the

best advantage they left him at the Barge and crossed the river to the

towing-path. Slight in build--for of all the Forsytes only old Swithin

and George were beefy--Jolly was rowing 'Two' in a trial eight. He

looked very earnest and strenuous. With pride Jolyon thought him the

best-looking boy of the lot; Holly, as became a sister, was more struck

by one or two of the others, but would not have said so for the world.

The river was bright that afternoon, the meadows lush, the trees still

beautiful with colour. Distinguished peace clung around the old city;

Jolyon promised himself a day's sketching if the weather held. The Eight

passed a second time, spurting home along the Barges--Jolly's face was

very set, so as not to show that he was blown. They returned across the

river and waited for him.

"Oh!" said Jolly in the Christ Church meadows, "I had to ask that chap

Val Dartie to dine with us to-night. He wanted to give you lunch and

show you B.N.C., so I thought I'd better; then you needn't go. I don't

like him much."

Holly's rather sallow face had become suffused with pink.

"Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know. He seems to me rather showy and bad form. What are

his people like, Dad? He's only a second cousin, isn't he?"

Jolyon took refuge in a smile.

"Ask Holly," he said; "she saw his uncle."

"I liked Val," Holly answered, staring at the ground before her; "his

uncle looked--awfully different." She stole a glance at Jolly from under

her lashes.

"Did you ever," said Jolyon with whimsical intention, "hear our family

history, my dears? It's quite a fairy tale. The first Jolyon Forsyte--at

all events the first we know anything of, and that would be your

great-great-grandfather--dwelt in the land of Dorset on the edge of the

sea, being by profession an 'agriculturalist,' as your great-aunt put

it, and the son of an agriculturist--farmers, in fact; your grandfather

used to call them, 'Very small beer.'" He looked at Jolly to see how

his lordliness was standing it, and with the other eye noted Holly's

malicious pleasure in the slight drop of her brother's face.

"We may suppose him thick and sturdy, standing for England as it

was before the Industrial Era began. The second Jolyon Forsyte--your

great-grandfather, Jolly; better known as Superior Dosset Forsyte--built

houses, so the chronicle runs, begat ten children, and migrated to

London town. It is known that he drank sherry. We may suppose him

representing the England of Napoleon's wars, and general unrest. The

eldest of his six sons was the third Jolyon, your grandfather, my

dears--tea merchant and chairman of companies, one of the soundest

Englishmen who ever lived--and to me the dearest." Jolyon's voice had

lost its irony, and his son and daughter gazed at him solemnly, "He was

just and tenacious, tender and young at heart. You remember him, and I

remember him. Pass to the others! Your great-uncle James, that's young

Val's grandfather, had a son called Soames--whereby hangs a tale of no

love lost, and I don't think I'll tell it you. James and the other eight

children of 'Superior Dosset,' of whom there are still five alive, may

be said to have represented Victorian England, with its principles of

trade and individualism at five per cent. and your money back--if you

know what that means. At all events they've turned thirty thousand

pounds into a cool million between them in the course of their long

lives. They never did a wild thing--unless it was your great-uncle

Swithin, who I believe was once swindled at thimble-rig, and was called

'Four-in-hand Forsyte' because he drove a pair. Their day is passing,

and their type, not altogether for the advantage of the country.

They were pedestrian, but they too were sound. I am the fourth Jolyon

Forsyte--a poor holder of the name--"

"No, Dad," said Jolly, and Holly squeezed his hand.

"Yes," repeated Jolyon, "a poor specimen, representing, I'm afraid,

nothing but the end of the century, unearned income, amateurism, and

individual liberty--a different thing from individualism, Jolly. You

are the fifth Jolyon Forsyte, old man, and you open the ball of the new

century."

As he spoke they turned in through the college gates, and Holly said:

"It's fascinating, Dad."

None of them quite knew what she meant. Jolly was grave.

The Rainbow, distinguished, as only an Oxford hostel can be, for lack

of modernity, provided one small oak-panelled private sitting-room, in

which Holly sat to receive, white-frocked, shy, and alone, when the only

guest arrived. Rather as one would touch a moth, Val took her hand. And

wouldn't she wear this 'measly flower'? It would look ripping in her

hair. He removed a gardenia from his coat.

"Oh! No, thank you--I couldn't!" But she took it and pinned it at her

neck, having suddenly remembered that word 'showy'! Val's buttonhole

would give offence; and she so much wanted Jolly to like him. Did she

realise that Val was at his best and quietest in her presence, and was

that, perhaps, half the secret of his attraction for her?

"I never said anything about our ride, Val."

"Rather not! It's just between us."

By the uneasiness of his hands and the fidgeting of his feet he was

giving her a sense of power very delicious; a soft feeling too--the wish

to make him happy.

"Do tell me about Oxford. It must be ever so lovely."

Val admitted that it was frightfully decent to do what you liked; the

lectures were nothing; and there were some very good chaps. "Only,"

he added, "of course I wish I was in town, and could come down and see

you."

Holly moved one hand shyly on her knee, and her glance dropped.

"You haven't forgotten," he said, suddenly gathering courage, "that

we're going mad-rabbiting together?"

Holly smiled.

"Oh! That was only make-believe. One can't do that sort of thing after

one's grown up, you know."

"Dash it! cousins can," said Val. "Next Long Vac.--it begins in June,

you know, and goes on for ever--we'll watch our chance."

But, though the thrill of conspiracy ran through her veins, Holly shook

her head. "It won't come off," she murmured.

"Won't it!" said Val fervently; "who's going to stop it? Not your father

or your brother."

At this moment Jolyon and Jolly came in; and romance fled into Val's

patent leather and Holly's white satin toes, where it itched and tingled

during an evening not conspicuous for open-heartedness.

Sensitive to atmosphere, Jolyon soon felt the latent antagonism between

the boys, and was puzzled by Holly; so he became unconsciously ironical,

which is fatal to the expansiveness of youth. A letter, handed to him

after dinner, reduced him to a silence hardly broken till Jolly and Val

rose to go. He went out with them, smoking his cigar, and walked with

his son to the gates of Christ Church. Turning back, he took out the

letter and read it again beneath a lamp.

"DEAR JOLYON,

"Soames came again to-night--my thirty-seventh birthday. You were right,

I mustn't stay here. I'm going to-morrow to the Piedmont Hotel, but I

won't go abroad without seeing you. I feel lonely and down-hearted.

"Yours affectionately,

"IRENE."

He folded the letter back into his pocket and walked on, astonished at

the violence of his feelings. What had the fellow said or done?

He turned into High Street, down the Turf, and on among a maze of spires

and domes and long college fronts and walls, bright or dark-shadowed in

the strong moonlight. In this very heart of England's gentility it was

difficult to realise that a lonely woman could be importuned or hunted,

but what else could her letter mean? Soames must have been pressing her

to go back to him again, with public opinion and the Law on his side,

too! 'Eighteen-ninety-nine!,' he thought, gazing at the broken glass

shining on the top of a villa garden wall; 'but when it comes to

property we're still a heathen people! I'll go up to-morrow morning. I

dare say it'll be best for her to go abroad.' Yet the thought displeased

him. Why should Soames hunt her out of England! Besides, he might

follow, and out there she would be still more helpless against the

attentions of her own husband! 'I must tread warily,' he thought; 'that

fellow could make himself very nasty. I didn't like his manner in the

cab the other night.' His thoughts turned to his daughter June. Could

she help? Once on a time Irene had been her greatest friend, and now she

was a 'lame duck,' such as must appeal to June's nature! He determined

to wire to his daughter to meet him at Paddington Station. Retracing his

steps towards the Rainbow he questioned his own sensations. Would he be

upsetting himself over every woman in like case? No! he would not. The

candour of this conclusion discomfited him; and, finding that Holly had

gone up to bed, he sought his own room. But he could not sleep, and

sat for a long time at his window, huddled in an overcoat, watching the

moonlight on the roofs.

Next door Holly too was awake, thinking of the lashes above and below

Val's eyes, especially below; and of what she could do to make Jolly

like him better. The scent of the gardenia was strong in her little

bedroom, and pleasant to her.

And Val, leaning out of his first-floor window in B.N.C., was gazing

at a moonlit quadrangle without seeing it at all, seeing instead Holly,

slim and white-frocked, as she sat beside the fire when he first went

in.

But Jolly, in his bedroom narrow as a ghost, lay with a hand beneath

his cheek and dreamed he was with Val in one boat, rowing a race against

him, while his father was calling from the towpath: 'Two! Get your hands

away there, bless you!'

CHAPTER II--SOAMES PUTS IT TO THE TOUCH

Of all those radiant firms which emblazon with their windows the West

End of London, Gaves and Cortegal were considered by Soames the most

'attractive' word just coming into fashion. He had never had his Uncle

Swithin's taste in precious stones, and the abandonment by Irene when

she left his house in 1887 of all the glittering things he had given

her had disgusted him with this form of investment. But he still knew a

diamond when he saw one, and during the week before her birthday he had

taken occasion, on his way into the Poultry or his way out therefrom, to

dally a little before the greater jewellers where one got, if not one's

money's worth, at least a certain cachet with the goods.

Constant cogitation since his drive with Jolyon had convinced him more

and more of the supreme importance of this moment in his life, the

supreme need for taking steps and those not wrong. And, alongside

the dry and reasoned sense that it was now or never with his

self-preservation, now or never if he were to range himself and found

a family, went the secret urge of his senses roused by the sight of her

who had once been a passionately desired wife, and the conviction that

it was a sin against common sense and the decent secrecy of Forsytes to

waste the wife he had.

In an opinion on Winifred's case, Dreamer, Q.C.--he would much have

preferred Waterbuck, but they had made him a judge (so late in the day

as to rouse the usual suspicion of a political job)--had advised that

they should go forward and obtain restitution of conjugal rights, a

point which to Soames had never been in doubt. When they had obtained a

decree to that effect they must wait to see if it was obeyed. If not,

it would constitute legal desertion, and they should obtain evidence of

misconduct and file their petition for divorce. All of which Soames knew

perfectly well. They had marked him ten and one. This simplicity in his

sister's case only made him the more desperate about the difficulty

in his own. Everything, in fact, was driving him towards the simple

solution of Irene's return. If it were still against the grain with her,

had he not feelings to subdue, injury to forgive, pain to forget? He

at least had never injured her, and this was a world of compromise! He

could offer her so much more than she had now. He would be prepared

to make a liberal settlement on her which could not be upset. He often

scrutinised his image in these days. He had never been a peacock like

that fellow Dartie, or fancied himself a woman's man, but he had

a certain belief in his own appearance--not unjustly, for it was

well-coupled and preserved, neat, healthy, pale, unblemished by drink

or excess of any kind. The Forsyte jaw and the concentration of his face

were, in his eyes, virtues. So far as he could tell there was no feature

of him which need inspire dislike.

Thoughts and yearnings, with which one lives daily, become natural, even

if far-fetched in their inception. If he could only give tangible proof

enough of his determination to let bygones be bygones, and to do all in

his power to please her, why should she not come back to him?

He entered Gaves and Cortegal's therefore, on the morning of November

the 9th, to buy a certain diamond brooch. "Four twenty-five and dirt

cheap, sir, at the money. It's a lady's brooch." There was that in

his mood which made him accept without demur. And he went on into the

Poultry with the flat green morocco case in his breast pocket. Several

times that day he opened it to look at the seven soft shining stones in

their velvet oval nest.

"If the lady doesn't like it, sir, happy to exchange it any time. But

there's no fear of that." If only there were not! He got through a vast

amount of work, only soother of the nerves he knew. A cablegram came

while he was in the office with details from the agent in Buenos Aires,

and the name and address of a stewardess who would be prepared to swear

to what was necessary. It was a timely spur to Soames, with his rooted

distaste for the washing of dirty linen in public. And when he set forth

by Underground to Victoria Station he received a fresh impetus towards

the renewal of his married life from the account in his evening paper of

a fashionable divorce suit. The homing instinct of all true Forsytes in

anxiety and trouble, the corporate tendency which kept them strong and

solid, made him choose to dine at Park Lane. He neither could nor

would breath a word to his people of his intention--too reticent and

proud--but the thought that at least they would be glad if they knew,

and wish him luck, was heartening.

James was in lugubrious mood, for the fire which the impudence of

Kruger's ultimatum had lit in him had been cold-watered by the poor

success of the last month, and the exhortations to effort in The Times.

He didn't know where it would end. Soames sought to cheer him by the

continual use of the word Buller. But James couldn't tell! There was

Colley--and he got stuck on that hill, and this Ladysmith was down in

a hollow, and altogether it looked to him a 'pretty kettle of fish'; he

thought they ought to be sending the sailors--they were the chaps,

they did a lot of good in the Crimea. Soames shifted the ground of

consolation. Winifred had heard from Val that there had been a 'rag' and

a bonfire on Guy Fawkes Day at Oxford, and that he had escaped detection

by blacking his face.

"Ah!" James muttered, "he's a clever little chap." But he shook his head

shortly afterwards and remarked that he didn't know what would become of

him, and looking wistfully at his son, murmured on that Soames had

never had a boy. He would have liked a grandson of his own name. And

now--well, there it was!

Soames flinched. He had not expected such a challenge to disclose the

secret in his heart. And Emily, who saw him wince, said:

"Nonsense, James; don't talk like that!"

But James, not looking anyone in the face, muttered on. There were Roger

and Nicholas and Jolyon; they all had grandsons. And Swithin and Timothy

had never married. He had done his best; but he would soon be gone now.

And, as though he had uttered words of profound consolation, he was

silent, eating brains with a fork and a piece of bread, and swallowing

the bread.

Soames excused himself directly after dinner. It was not really cold,

but he put on his fur coat, which served to fortify him against the

fits of nervous shivering to which he had been subject all day.

Subconsciously, he knew that he looked better thus than in an ordinary

black overcoat. Then, feeling the morocco case flat against his heart,

he sallied forth. He was no smoker, but he lit a cigarette, and smoked

it gingerly as he walked along. He moved slowly down the Row towards

Knightsbridge, timing himself to get to Chelsea at nine-fifteen. What

did she do with herself evening after evening in that little hole? How

mysterious women were! One lived alongside and knew nothing of them.

What could she have seen in that fellow Bosinney to send her mad? For

there was madness after all in what she had done--crazy moonstruck

madness, in which all sense of values had been lost, and her life

and his life ruined! And for a moment he was filled with a sort of

exaltation, as though he were a man read of in a story who, possessed by

the Christian spirit, would restore to her all the prizes of existence,

forgiving and forgetting, and becoming the godfather of her future.

Under a tree opposite Knightsbridge Barracks, where the moon-light

struck down clear and white, he took out once more the morocco case, and

let the beams draw colour from those stones. Yes, they were of the first

water! But, at the hard closing snap of the case, another cold shiver

ran through his nerves; and he walked on faster, clenching his gloved

hands in the pockets of his coat, almost hoping she would not be in. The

thought of how mysterious she was again beset him. Dining alone there

night after night--in an evening dress, too, as if she were making

believe to be in society! Playing the piano--to herself! Not even a dog

or cat, so far as he had seen. And that reminded him suddenly of the

mare he kept for station work at Mapledurham. If ever he went to the

stable, there she was quite alone, half asleep, and yet, on her home

journeys going more freely than on her way out, as if longing to be

back and lonely in her stable! 'I would treat her well,' he thought

incoherently. 'I would be very careful.' And all that capacity for

home life of which a mocking Fate seemed for ever to have deprived him

swelled suddenly in Soames, so that he dreamed dreams opposite South

Kensington Station. In the King's Road a man came slithering out of a

public house playing a concertina. Soames watched him for a moment dance

crazily on the pavement to his own drawling jagged sounds, then crossed

over to avoid contact with this piece of drunken foolery. A night in the

lock-up! What asses people were! But the man had noticed his movement

of avoidance, and streams of genial blasphemy followed him across the

street. 'I hope they'll run him in,' thought Soames viciously. 'To have

ruffians like that about, with women out alone!' A woman's figure in

front had induced this thought. Her walk seemed oddly familiar, and when

she turned the corner for which he was bound, his heart began to beat.

He hastened on to the corner to make certain. Yes! It was Irene; he

could not mistake her walk in that little drab street. She threaded two

more turnings, and from the last corner he saw her enter her block of

flats. To make sure of her now, he ran those few paces, hurried up the

stairs, and caught her standing at her door. He heard the latchkey in

the lock, and reached her side just as she turned round, startled, in

the open doorway.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, breathless. "I happened to see you. Let me

come in a minute."

She had put her hand up to her breast, her face was colourless, her eyes

widened by alarm. Then seeming to master herself, she inclined her head,

and said: "Very well."

Soames closed the door. He, too, had need to recover, and when she had

passed into the sitting-room, waited a full minute, taking deep breaths

to still the beating of his heart. At this moment, so fraught with the

future, to take out that morocco case seemed crude. Yet, not to take it

out left him there before her with no preliminary excuse for coming. And

in this dilemma he was seized with impatience at all this paraphernalia

of excuse and justification. This was a scene--it could be nothing else,

and he must face it. He heard her voice, uncomfortably, pathetically

soft:

"Why have you come again? Didn't you understand that I would rather you

did not?"

He noticed her clothes--a dark brown velvet corduroy, a sable boa, a

small round toque of the same. They suited her admirably. She had money

to spare for dress, evidently! He said abruptly:

"It's your birthday. I brought you this," and he held out to her the

green morocco case.

"Oh! No-no!"

Soames pressed the clasp; the seven stones gleamed out on the pale grey

velvet.

"Why not?" he said. "Just as a sign that you don't bear me ill-feeling

any longer."

"I couldn't."

Soames took it out of the case.

"Let me just see how it looks."

She shrank back.

He followed, thrusting his hand with the brooch in it against the front

of her dress. She shrank again.

Soames dropped his hand.

"Irene," he said, "let bygones be bygones. If I can, surely you might.

Let's begin again, as if nothing had been. Won't you?" His voice was

wistful, and his eyes, resting on her face, had in them a sort of

supplication.

She, who was standing literally with her back against the wall, gave a

little gulp, and that was all her answer. Soames went on:

"Can you really want to live all your days half-dead in this little

hole? Come back to me, and I'll give you all you want. You shall live

your own life; I swear it."

He saw her face quiver ironically.

"Yes," he repeated, "but I mean it this time. I'll only ask one thing.

I just want--I just want a son. Don't look like that! I want one. It's

hard." His voice had grown hurried, so that he hardly knew it for his

own, and twice he jerked his head back as if struggling for breath. It

was the sight of her eyes fixed on him, dark with a sort of fascinated

fright, which pulled him together and changed that painful incoherence

to anger.

"Is it so very unnatural?" he said between his teeth, "Is it unnatural

to want a child from one's own wife? You wrecked our life and put this

blight on everything. We go on only half alive, and without any future.

Is it so very unflattering to you that in spite of everything I--I still

want you for my wife? Speak, for Goodness' sake! do speak."

Irene seemed to try, but did not succeed.

"I don't want to frighten you," said Soames more gently. "Heaven knows.

I only want you to see that I can't go on like this. I want you back. I

want you."

Irene raised one hand and covered the lower part of her face, but her

eyes never moved from his, as though she trusted in them to keep him at

bay. And all those years, barren and bitter, since--ah! when?--almost

since he had first known her, surged up in one great wave of

recollection in Soames; and a spasm that for his life he could not

control constricted his face.

"It's not too late," he said; "it's not--if you'll only believe it."

Irene uncovered her lips, and both her hands made a writhing gesture in

front of her breast. Soames seized them.

"Don't!" she said under her breath. But he stood holding on to them,

trying to stare into her eyes which did not waver. Then she said

quietly:

"I am alone here. You won't behave again as you once behaved."

Dropping her hands as though they had been hot irons, he turned away.

Was it possible that there could be such relentless unforgiveness! Could

that one act of violent possession be still alive within her? Did it bar

him thus utterly? And doggedly he said, without looking up:

"I am not going till you've answered me. I am offering what few men

would bring themselves to offer, I want a--a reasonable answer."

And almost with surprise he heard her say:

"You can't have a reasonable answer. Reason has nothing to do with it.

You can only have the brutal truth: I would rather die."

Soames stared at her.

"Oh!" he said. And there intervened in him a sort of paralysis of speech

and movement, the kind of quivering which comes when a man has received

a deadly insult, and does not yet know how he is going to take it, or

rather what it is going to do with him.

"Oh!" he said again, "as bad as that? Indeed! You would rather die.

That's pretty!"

"I am sorry. You wanted me to answer. I can't help the truth, can I?"

At that queer spiritual appeal Soames turned for relief to actuality. He

snapped the brooch back into its case and put it in his pocket.

"The truth!" he said; "there's no such thing with women. It's

nerves-nerves."

He heard the whisper:

"Yes; nerves don't lie. Haven't you discovered that?" He was silent,

obsessed by the thought: 'I will hate this woman. I will hate her.' That

was the trouble! If only he could! He shot a glance at her who stood

unmoving against the wall with her head up and her hands clasped, for

all the world as if she were going to be shot. And he said quickly:

"I don't believe a word of it. You have a lover. If you hadn't, you

wouldn't be such a--such a little idiot." He was conscious, before the

expression in her eyes, that he had uttered something of a non-sequitur,

and dropped back too abruptly into the verbal freedom of his connubial

days. He turned away to the door. But he could not go out. Something

within him--that most deep and secret Forsyte quality, the impossibility

of letting go, the impossibility of seeing the fantastic and forlorn

nature of his own tenacity--prevented him. He turned about again, and

there stood, with his back against the door, as hers was against

the wall opposite, quite unconscious of anything ridiculous in this

separation by the whole width of the room.

"Do you ever think of anybody but yourself?" he said.

Irene's lips quivered; then she answered slowly:

"Do you ever think that I found out my mistake--my hopeless, terrible

mistake--the very first week of our marriage; that I went on trying

three years--you know I went on trying? Was it for myself?"

Soames gritted his teeth. "God knows what it was. I've never understood

you; I shall never understand you. You had everything you wanted; and

you can have it again, and more. What's the matter with me? I ask you a

plain question: What is it?" Unconscious of the pathos in that enquiry,

he went on passionately: "I'm not lame, I'm not loathsome, I'm not a

boor, I'm not a fool. What is it? What's the mystery about me?"

Her answer was a long sigh.

He clasped his hands with a gesture that for him was strangely full

of expression. "When I came here to-night I was--I hoped--I meant

everything that I could to do away with the past, and start fair again.

And you meet me with 'nerves,' and silence, and sighs. There's nothing

tangible. It's like--it's like a spider's web."

"Yes."

That whisper from across the room maddened Soames afresh.

"Well, I don't choose to be in a spider's web. I'll cut it." He walked

straight up to her. "Now!" What he had gone up to her to do he really

did not know. But when he was close, the old familiar scent of her

clothes suddenly affected him. He put his hands on her shoulders and

bent forward to kiss her. He kissed not her lips, but a little hard line

where the lips had been drawn in; then his face was pressed away by her

hands; he heard her say: "Oh! No!" Shame, compunction, sense of futility

flooded his whole being, he turned on his heel and went straight out.

CHAPTER III--VISIT TO IRENE

Jolyon found June waiting on the platform at Paddington. She had

received his telegram while at breakfast. Her abode--a studio and two

bedrooms in a St. John's Wood garden--had been selected by her for the

complete independence which it guaranteed. Unwatched by Mrs. Grundy,

unhindered by permanent domestics, she could receive lame ducks at any

hour of day or night, and not seldom had a duck without studio of its

own made use of June's. She enjoyed her freedom, and possessed herself

with a sort of virginal passion; the warmth which she would have

lavished on Bosinney, and of which--given her Forsyte tenacity--he must

surely have tired, she now expended in championship of the underdogs and

budding 'geniuses' of the artistic world. She lived, in fact, to turn

ducks into the swans she believed they were. The very fervour of her

protection warped her judgments. But she was loyal and liberal; her

small eager hand was ever against the oppressions of academic and

commercial opinion, and though her income was considerable, her bank

balance was often a minus quantity.

She had come to Paddington Station heated in her soul by a visit to Eric

Cobbley. A miserable Gallery had refused to let that straight-haired

genius have his one-man show after all. Its impudent manager, after

visiting his studio, had expressed the opinion that it would only be a

'one-horse show from the selling point of view.' This crowning example

of commercial cowardice towards her favourite lame duck--and he so hard

up, with a wife and two children, that he had caused her account to be

overdrawn--was still making the blood glow in her small, resolute face,

and her red-gold hair to shine more than ever. She gave her father a

hug, and got into a cab with him, having as many fish to fry with him as

he with her. It became at once a question which would fry them first.

Jolyon had reached the words: "My dear, I want you to come with me,"

when, glancing at her face, he perceived by her blue eyes moving from

side to side--like the tail of a preoccupied cat--that she was not

attending. "Dad, is it true that I absolutely can't get at any of my

money?"

"Only the income, fortunately, my love."

"How perfectly beastly! Can't it be done somehow? There must be a way. I

know I could buy a small Gallery for ten thousand pounds."

"A small Gallery," murmured Jolyon, "seems a modest desire. But your

grandfather foresaw it."

"I think," cried June vigorously, "that all this care about money is

awful, when there's so much genius in the world simply crushed out for

want of a little. I shall never marry and have children; why shouldn't

I be able to do some good instead of having it all tied up in case of

things which will never come off?"

"Our name is Forsyte, my dear," replied Jolyon in the ironical voice

to which his impetuous daughter had never quite grown accustomed; "and

Forsytes, you know, are people who so settle their property that their

grandchildren, in case they should die before their parents, have to

make wills leaving the property that will only come to themselves

when their parents die. Do you follow that? Nor do I, but it's a fact,

anyway; we live by the principle that so long as there is a possibility

of keeping wealth in the family it must not go out; if you die

unmarried, your money goes to Jolly and Holly and their children if they

marry. Isn't it pleasant to know that whatever you do you can none of

you be destitute?"

"But can't I borrow the money?"

Jolyon shook his head. "You could rent a Gallery, no doubt, if you could

manage it out of your income."

June uttered a contemptuous sound.

"Yes; and have no income left to help anybody with."

"My dear child," murmured Jolyon, "wouldn't it come to the same thing?"

"No," said June shrewdly, "I could buy for ten thousand; that would only

be four hundred a year. But I should have to pay a thousand a year rent,

and that would only leave me five hundred. If I had the Gallery, Dad,

think what I could do. I could make Eric Cobbley's name in no time, and

ever so many others."

"Names worth making make themselves in time."

"When they're dead."

"Did you ever know anybody living, my dear, improved by having his name

made?"

"Yes, you," said June, pressing his arm.

Jolyon started. 'I?' he thought. 'Oh! Ah! Now she's going to ask me to

do something. We take it out, we Forsytes, each in our different ways.'

June came closer to him in the cab.

"Darling," she said, "you buy the Gallery, and I'll pay you four hundred

a year for it. Then neither of us will be any the worse off. Besides,

it's a splendid investment."

Jolyon wriggled. "Don't you think," he said, "that for an artist to buy

a Gallery is a bit dubious? Besides, ten thousand pounds is a lump, and

I'm not a commercial character."

June looked at him with admiring appraisement.

"Of course you're not, but you're awfully businesslike. And I'm sure we

could make it pay. It'll be a perfect way of scoring off those wretched

dealers and people." And again she squeezed her father's arm.

Jolyon's face expressed quizzical despair.

"Where is this desirable Gallery? Splendidly situated, I suppose?"

"Just off Cork Street."

'Ah!' thought Jolyon, 'I knew it was just off somewhere. Now for what I

want out of her!'

"Well, I'll think of it, but not just now. You remember Irene? I want

you to come with me and see her. Soames is after her again. She might be

safer if we could give her asylum somewhere."

The word asylum, which he had used by chance, was of all most calculated

to rouse June's interest.

"Irene! I haven't seen her since! Of course! I'd love to help her."

It was Jolyon's turn to squeeze her arm, in warm admiration for this

spirited, generous-hearted little creature of his begetting.

"Irene is proud," he said, with a sidelong glance, in sudden doubt of

June's discretion; "she's difficult to help. We must tread gently. This

is the place. I wired her to expect us. Let's send up our cards."

"I can't bear Soames," said June as she got out; "he sneers at

everything that isn't successful."

Irene was in what was called the 'Ladies' drawing-room' of the Piedmont

Hotel.

Nothing if not morally courageous, June walked straight up to her former

friend, kissed her cheek, and the two settled down on a sofa never sat

on since the hotel's foundation. Jolyon could see that Irene was deeply

affected by this simple forgiveness.

"So Soames has been worrying you?" he said.

"I had a visit from him last night; he wants me to go back to him."

"You're not going, of course?" cried June.

Irene smiled faintly and shook her head. "But his position is horrible,"

she murmured.

"It's his own fault; he ought to have divorced you when he could."

Jolyon remembered how fervently in the old days June had hoped that no

divorce would smirch her dead and faithless lover's name.

"Let us hear what Irene is going to do," he said.

Irene's lips quivered, but she spoke calmly.

"I'd better give him fresh excuse to get rid of me."

"How horrible!" cried June.

"What else can I do?"

"Out of the question," said Jolyon very quietly, "sans amour."

He thought she was going to cry; but, getting up quickly, she half

turned her back on them, and stood regaining control of herself.

June said suddenly:

"Well, I shall go to Soames and tell him he must leave you alone. What

does he want at his age?"

"A child. It's not unnatural"

"A child!" cried June scornfully. "Of course! To leave his money to. If

he wants one badly enough let him take somebody and have one; then you

can divorce him, and he can marry her."

Jolyon perceived suddenly that he had made a mistake to bring June--her

violent partizanship was fighting Soames' battle.

"It would be best for Irene to come quietly to us at Robin Hill, and see

how things shape."

"Of course," said June; "only...."

Irene looked full at Jolyon--in all his many attempts afterwards to

analyze that glance he never could succeed.

"No! I should only bring trouble on you all. I will go abroad."

He knew from her voice that this was final. The irrelevant thought

flashed through him: 'Well, I could see her there.' But he said:

"Don't you think you would be more helpless abroad, in case he

followed?"

"I don't know. I can but try."

June sprang up and paced the room. "It's all horrible," she said. "Why

should people be tortured and kept miserable and helpless year after

year by this disgusting sanctimonious law?" But someone had come into

the room, and June came to a standstill. Jolyon went up to Irene:

"Do you want money?"

"No."

"And would you like me to let your flat?"

"Yes, Jolyon, please."

"When shall you be going?"

"To-morrow."

"You won't go back there in the meantime, will you?" This he said with

an anxiety strange to himself.

"No; I've got all I want here."

"You'll send me your address?"

She put out her hand to him. "I feel you're a rock."

"Built on sand," answered Jolyon, pressing her hand hard; "but it's a

pleasure to do anything, at any time, remember that. And if you change

your mind...! Come along, June; say good-bye."

June came from the window and flung her arms round Irene.

"Don't think of him," she said under her breath; "enjoy yourself, and

bless you!"

With a memory of tears in Irene's eyes, and of a smile on her lips, they

went away extremely silent, passing the lady who had interrupted the

interview and was turning over the papers on the table.

Opposite the National Gallery June exclaimed:

"Of all undignified beasts and horrible laws!"

But Jolyon did not respond. He had something of his father's balance,

and could see things impartially even when his emotions were roused.

Irene was right; Soames' position was as bad or worse than her own. As

for the law--it catered for a human nature of which it took a naturally

low view. And, feeling that if he stayed in his daughter's company he

would in one way or another commit an indiscretion, he told her he must

catch his train back to Oxford; and hailing a cab, left her to Turner's

water-colours, with the promise that he would think over that Gallery.

But he thought over Irene instead. Pity, they said, was akin to love!

If so he was certainly in danger of loving her, for he pitied her

profoundly. To think of her drifting about Europe so handicapped and

lonely! 'I hope to goodness she'll keep her head!' he thought; 'she

might easily grow desperate.' In fact, now that she had cut loose from

her poor threads of occupation, he couldn't imagine how she would go

on--so beautiful a creature, hopeless, and fair game for anyone! In his

exasperation was more than a little fear and jealousy. Women did strange

things when they were driven into corners. 'I wonder what Soames will do

now!' he thought. 'A rotten, idiotic state of things! And I suppose they

would say it was her own fault.' Very preoccupied and sore at heart, he

got into his train, mislaid his ticket, and on the platform at Oxford

took his hat off to a lady whose face he seemed to remember without

being able to put a name to her, not even when he saw her having tea at

the Rainbow.

CHAPTER IV--WHERE FORSYTES FEAR TO TREAD

Quivering from the defeat of his hopes, with the green morocco case

still flat against his heart, Soames revolved thoughts bitter as death.

A spider's web! Walking fast, and noting nothing in the moonlight,

he brooded over the scene he had been through, over the memory of her

figure rigid in his grasp. And the more he brooded, the more certain

he became that she had a lover--her words, 'I would sooner die!' were

ridiculous if she had not. Even if she had never loved him, she had made

no fuss until Bosinney came on the scene. No; she was in love again, or

she would not have made that melodramatic answer to his proposal, which

in all the circumstances was reasonable! Very well! That simplified

matters.

'I'll take steps to know where I am,' he thought; 'I'll go to Polteed's

the first thing tomorrow morning.'

But even in forming that resolution he knew he would have trouble with

himself. He had employed Polteed's agency several times in the routine

of his profession, even quite lately over Dartie's case, but he had

never thought it possible to employ them to watch his own wife.

It was too insulting to himself!

He slept over that project and his wounded pride--or rather, kept vigil.

Only while shaving did he suddenly remember that she called herself

by her maiden name of Heron. Polteed would not know, at first at all

events, whose wife she was, would not look at him obsequiously and leer

behind his back. She would just be the wife of one of his clients. And

that would be true--for was he not his own solicitor?

He was literally afraid not to put his design into execution at the

first possible moment, lest, after all, he might fail himself. And

making Warmson bring him an early cup of coffee; he stole out of the

house before the hour of breakfast. He walked rapidly to one of those

small West End streets where Polteed's and other firms ministered to the

virtues of the wealthier classes. Hitherto he had always had Polteed to

see him in the Poultry; but he well knew their address, and reached it

at the opening hour. In the outer office, a room furnished so cosily

that it might have been a money-lender's, he was attended by a lady who

might have been a schoolmistress.

"I wish to see Mr. Claud Polteed. He knows me--never mind my name."

To keep everybody from knowing that he, Soames Forsyte, was reduced to

having his wife spied on, was the overpowering consideration.

Mr. Claud Polteed--so different from Mr. Lewis Polteed--was one of those

men with dark hair, slightly curved noses, and quick brown eyes, who

might be taken for Jews but are really Phoenicians; he received Soames

in a room hushed by thickness of carpet and curtains. It was, in fact,

confidentially furnished, without trace of document anywhere to be seen.

Greeting Soames deferentially, he turned the key in the only door with a

certain ostentation.

"If a client sends for me," he was in the habit of saying, "he takes

what precaution he likes. If he comes here, we convince him that we

have no leakages. I may safely say we lead in security, if in nothing

else....Now, sir, what can I do for you?"

Soames' gorge had risen so that he could hardly speak. It was absolutely

necessary to hide from this man that he had any but professional

interest in the matter; and, mechanically, his face assumed its sideway

smile.

"I've come to you early like this because there's not an hour to

lose"--if he lost an hour he might fail himself yet! "Have you a really

trustworthy woman free?"

Mr. Polteed unlocked a drawer, produced a memorandum, ran his eyes over

it, and locked the drawer up again.

"Yes," he said; "the very woman."

Soames had seated himself and crossed his legs--nothing but a faint

flush, which might have been his normal complexion, betrayed him.

"Send her off at once, then, to watch a Mrs. Irene Heron of Flat C,

Truro Mansions, Chelsea, till further notice."

"Precisely," said Mr. Polteed; "divorce, I presume?" and he blew into

a speaking-tube. "Mrs. Blanch in? I shall want to speak to her in ten

minutes."

"Deal with any reports yourself," resumed Soames, "and send them to me

personally, marked confidential, sealed and registered. My client exacts

the utmost secrecy."

Mr. Polteed smiled, as though saying, 'You are teaching your

grandmother, my dear sir;' and his eyes slid over Soames' face for one

unprofessional instant.

"Make his mind perfectly easy," he said. "Do you smoke?"

"No," said Soames. "Understand me: Nothing may come of this. If a

name gets out, or the watching is suspected, it may have very serious

consequences."

Mr. Polteed nodded. "I can put it into the cipher category. Under that

system a name is never mentioned; we work by numbers."

He unlocked another drawer and took out two slips of paper, wrote on

them, and handed one to Soames.

"Keep that, sir; it's your key. I retain this duplicate. The case we'll

call 7x. The party watched will be 17; the watcher 19; the Mansions 25;

yourself--I should say, your firm--31; my firm 32, myself 2. In case you

should have to mention your client in writing I have called him 43; any

person we suspect will be 47; a second person 51. Any special hint or

instruction while we're about it?"

"No," said Soames; "that is--every consideration compatible."

Again Mr. Polteed nodded. "Expense?"

Soames shrugged. "In reason," he answered curtly, and got up. "Keep it

entirely in your own hands."

"Entirely," said Mr. Polteed, appearing suddenly between him and the

door. "I shall be seeing you in that other case before long. Good

morning, sir." His eyes slid unprofessionally over Soames once more, and

he unlocked the door.

"Good morning," said Soames, looking neither to right nor left.

Out in the street he swore deeply, quietly, to himself. A spider's

web, and to cut it he must use this spidery, secret, unclean method,

so utterly repugnant to one who regarded his private life as his most

sacred piece of property. But the die was cast, he could not go back.

And he went on into the Poultry, and locked away the green morocco case

and the key to that cipher destined to make crystal-clear his domestic

bankruptcy.

Odd that one whose life was spent in bringing to the public eye all the

private coils of property, the domestic disagreements of others, should

dread so utterly the public eye turned on his own; and yet not odd,

for who should know so well as he the whole unfeeling process of legal

regulation.

He worked hard all day. Winifred was due at four o'clock; he was to take

her down to a conference in the Temple with Dreamer Q.C., and waiting

for her he re-read the letter he had caused her to write the day of

Dartie's departure, requiring him to return.

"DEAR MONTAGUE,

"I have received your letter with the news that you have left me for

ever and are on your way to Buenos Aires. It has naturally been a great

shock. I am taking this earliest opportunity of writing to tell you

that I am prepared to let bygones be bygones if you will return to me

at once. I beg you to do so. I am very much upset, and will not say any

more now. I am sending this letter registered to the address you left at

your Club. Please cable to me.

"Your still affectionate wife,

"WINIFRED DARTIE."

Ugh! What bitter humbug! He remembered leaning over Winifred while she

copied what he had pencilled, and how she had said, laying down her pen,

"Suppose he comes, Soames!" in such a strange tone of voice, as if she

did not know her own mind. "He won't come," he had answered, "till he's

spent his money. That's why we must act at once." Annexed to the copy of

that letter was the original of Dartie's drunken scrawl from the Iseeum

Club. Soames could have wished it had not been so manifestly penned in

liquor. Just the sort of thing the Court would pitch on. He seemed to

hear the Judge's voice say: "You took this seriously! Seriously enough

to write him as you did? Do you think he meant it?" Never mind! The fact

was clear that Dartie had sailed and had not returned. Annexed also was

his cabled answer: "Impossible return. Dartie." Soames shook his head.

If the whole thing were not disposed of within the next few months the

fellow would turn up again like a bad penny. It saved a thousand a year

at least to get rid of him, besides all the worry to Winifred and his

father. 'I must stiffen Dreamer's back,' he thought; 'we must push it

on.'

Winifred, who had adopted a kind of half-mourning which became her fair

hair and tall figure very well, arrived in James' barouche drawn by

James' pair. Soames had not seen it in the City since his father retired

from business five years ago, and its incongruity gave him a shock.

'Times are changing,' he thought; 'one doesn't know what'll go next!'

Top hats even were scarcer. He enquired after Val. Val, said Winifred,

wrote that he was going to play polo next term. She thought he was in a

very good set. She added with fashionably disguised anxiety: "Will there

be much publicity about my affair, Soames? Must it be in the papers?

It's so bad for him, and the girls."

With his own calamity all raw within him, Soames answered:

"The papers are a pushing lot; it's very difficult to keep things out.

They pretend to be guarding the public's morals, and they corrupt them

with their beastly reports. But we haven't got to that yet. We're

only seeing Dreamer to-day on the restitution question. Of course he

understands that it's to lead to a divorce; but you must seem genuinely

anxious to get Dartie back--you might practice that attitude to-day."

Winifred sighed.

"Oh! What a clown Monty's been!" she said.

Soames gave her a sharp look. It was clear to him that she could not

take her Dartie seriously, and would go back on the whole thing if given

half a chance. His own instinct had been firm in this matter from the

first. To save a little scandal now would only bring on his sister and

her children real disgrace and perhaps ruin later on if Dartie were

allowed to hang on to them, going down-hill and spending the money James

would leave his daughter. Though it was all tied up, that fellow would

milk the settlements somehow, and make his family pay through the

nose to keep him out of bankruptcy or even perhaps gaol! They left

the shining carriage, with the shining horses and the shining-hatted

servants on the Embankment, and walked up to Dreamer Q.C.'s Chambers in

Crown Office Row.

"Mr. Bellby is here, sir," said the clerk; "Mr. Dreamer will be ten

minutes."

Mr. Bellby, the junior--not as junior as he might have been, for Soames

only employed barristers of established reputation; it was, indeed,

something of a mystery to him how barristers ever managed to establish

that which made him employ them--Mr. Bellby was seated, taking a final

glance through his papers. He had come from Court, and was in wig and

gown, which suited a nose jutting out like the handle of a tiny pump,

his small shrewd blue eyes, and rather protruding lower lip--no better

man to supplement and stiffen Dreamer.

The introduction to Winifred accomplished, they leaped the weather and

spoke of the war. Soames interrupted suddenly:

"If he doesn't comply we can't bring proceedings for six months. I want

to get on with the matter, Bellby."

Mr. Bellby, who had the ghost of an Irish brogue, smiled at Winifred and

murmured: "The Law's delays, Mrs. Dartie."

"Six months!" repeated Soames; "it'll drive it up to June! We shan't

get the suit on till after the long vacation. We must put the screw on,

Bellby"--he would have all his work cut out to keep Winifred up to the

scratch.

"Mr. Dreamer will see you now, sir."

They filed in, Mr. Bellby going first, and Soames escorting Winifred

after an interval of one minute by his watch.

Dreamer Q.C., in a gown but divested of wig, was standing before the

fire, as if this conference were in the nature of a treat; he had the

leathery, rather oily complexion which goes with great learning,

a considerable nose with glasses perched on it, and little greyish

whiskers; he luxuriated in the perpetual cocking of one eye, and the

concealment of his lower with his upper lip, which gave a smothered turn

to his speech. He had a way, too, of coming suddenly round the corner on

the person he was talking to; this, with a disconcerting tone of

voice, and a habit of growling before he began to speak--had secured a

reputation second in Probate and Divorce to very few. Having listened,

eye cocked, to Mr. Bellby's breezy recapitulation of the facts, he

growled, and said:

"I know all that;" and coming round the corner at Winifred, smothered

the words:

"We want to get him back, don't we, Mrs. Dartie?"

Soames interposed sharply:

"My sister's position, of course, is intolerable."

Dreamer growled. "Exactly. Now, can we rely on the cabled refusal,

or must we wait till after Christmas to give him a chance to have

written--that's the point, isn't it?"

"The sooner...." Soames began.

"What do you say, Bellby?" said Dreamer, coming round his corner.

Mr. Bellby seemed to sniff the air like a hound.

"We won't be on till the middle of December. We've no need to give um

more rope than that."

"No," said Soames, "why should my sister be incommoded by his choosing

to go..."

"To Jericho!" said Dreamer, again coming round his corner; "quite so.

People oughtn't to go to Jericho, ought they, Mrs. Dartie?" And he

raised his gown into a sort of fantail. "I agree. We can go forward. Is

there anything more?"

"Nothing at present," said Soames meaningly; "I wanted you to see my

sister."

Dreamer growled softly: "Delighted. Good evening!" And let fall the

protection of his gown.

They filed out. Winifred went down the stairs. Soames lingered. In spite

of himself he was impressed by Dreamer.

"The evidence is all right, I think," he said to Bellby. "Between

ourselves, if we don't get the thing through quick, we never may. D'you

think he understands that?"

"I'll make um," said Bellby. "Good man though--good man."

Soames nodded and hastened after his sister. He found her in a draught,

biting her lips behind her veil, and at once said:

"The evidence of the stewardess will be very complete."

Winifred's face hardened; she drew herself up, and they walked to the

carriage. And, all through that silent drive back to Green Street, the

souls of both of them revolved a single thought: 'Why, oh! why should I

have to expose my misfortune to the public like this? Why have to employ

spies to peer into my private troubles? They were not of my making.'

CHAPTER V--JOLLY SITS IN JUDGMENT

The possessive instinct, which, so determinedly balked, was animating

two members of the Forsyte family towards riddance of what they could

no longer possess, was hardening daily in the British body politic.

Nicholas, originally so doubtful concerning a war which must affect

property, had been heard to say that these Boers were a pig-headed lot;

they were causing a lot of expense, and the sooner they had their lesson

the better. He would send out Wolseley! Seeing always a little further

than other people--whence the most considerable fortune of all the

Forsytes--he had perceived already that Buller was not the man--'a bull

of a chap, who just went butting, and if they didn't look out Ladysmith

would fall.' This was early in December, so that when Black Week came,

he was enabled to say to everybody: 'I told you so.' During that week of

gloom such as no Forsyte could remember, very young Nicholas attended

so many drills in his corps, 'The Devil's Own,' that young Nicholas

consulted the family physician about his son's health and was alarmed

to find that he was perfectly sound. The boy had only just eaten his

dinners and been called to the bar, at some expense, and it was in a

way a nightmare to his father and mother that he should be playing with

military efficiency at a time when military efficiency in the civilian

population might conceivably be wanted. His grandfather, of course,

pooh-poohed the notion, too thoroughly educated in the feeling that no

British war could be other than little and professional, and profoundly

distrustful of Imperial commitments, by which, moreover, he stood to

lose, for he owned De Beers, now going down fast, more than a sufficient

sacrifice on the part of his grandson.

At Oxford, however, rather different sentiments prevailed. The inherent

effervescence of conglomerate youth had, during the two months of the

term before Black Week, been gradually crystallising out into vivid

oppositions. Normal adolescence, ever in England of a conservative

tendency though not taking things too seriously, was vehement for a

fight to a finish and a good licking for the Boers. Of this larger

faction Val Dartie was naturally a member. Radical youth, on the other

hand, a small but perhaps more vocal body, was for stopping the war and

giving the Boers autonomy. Until Black Week, however, the groups were

amorphous, without sharp edges, and argument remained but academic.

Jolly was one of those who knew not where he stood. A streak of his

grandfather old Jolyon's love of justice prevented, him from seeing

one side only. Moreover, in his set of 'the best' there was a

'jumping-Jesus' of extremely advanced opinions and some personal

magnetism. Jolly wavered. His father, too, seemed doubtful in his views.

And though, as was proper at the age of twenty, he kept a sharp eye on

his father, watchful for defects which might still be remedied, still

that father had an 'air' which gave a sort of glamour to his creed of

ironic tolerance. Artists of course; were notoriously Hamlet-like, and

to this extent one must discount for one's father, even if one loved

him. But Jolyon's original view, that to 'put your nose in where you

aren't wanted' (as the Uitlanders had done) 'and then work the oracle

till you get on top is not being quite the clean potato,' had, whether

founded in fact or no, a certain attraction for his son, who thought a

deal about gentility. On the other hand Jolly could not abide such as

his set called 'cranks,' and Val's set called 'smugs,' so that he was

still balancing when the clock of Black Week struck. One--two--three,

came those ominous repulses at Stormberg, Magersfontein, Colenso. The

sturdy English soul reacting after the first cried, 'Ah! but Methuen!'

after the second: 'Ah! but Buller!' then, in inspissated gloom,

hardened. And Jolly said to himself: 'No, damn it! We've got to lick the

beggars now; I don't care whether we're right or wrong.' And, if he had

known it, his father was thinking the same thought.

That next Sunday, last of the term, Jolly was bidden to wine with 'one

of the best.' After the second toast, 'Buller and damnation to the

Boers,' drunk--no heel taps--in the college Burgundy, he noticed that

Val Dartie, also a guest, was looking at him with a grin and saying

something to his neighbour. He was sure it was disparaging. The last boy

in the world to make himself conspicuous or cause public disturbance,

Jolly grew rather red and shut his lips. The queer hostility he

had always felt towards his second-cousin was strongly and suddenly

reinforced. 'All right!' he thought, 'you wait, my friend!' More wine

than was good for him, as the custom was, helped him to remember, when

they all trooped forth to a secluded spot, to touch Val on the arm.

"What did you say about me in there?"

"Mayn't I say what I like?"

"No."

"Well, I said you were a pro-Boer--and so you are!"

"You're a liar!"

"D'you want a row?"

"Of course, but not here; in the garden."

"All right. Come on."

They went, eyeing each other askance, unsteady, and unflinching; they

climbed the garden railings. The spikes on the top slightly ripped Val's

sleeve, and occupied his mind. Jolly's mind was occupied by the thought

that they were going to fight in the precincts of a college foreign to

them both. It was not the thing, but never mind--the young beast!

They passed over the grass into very nearly darkness, and took off their

coats.

"You're not screwed, are you?" said Jolly suddenly. "I can't fight you

if you're screwed."

"No more than you."

"All right then."

Without shaking hands, they put themselves at once into postures of

defence. They had drunk too much for science, and so were especially

careful to assume correct attitudes, until Jolly smote Val almost

accidentally on the nose. After that it was all a dark and ugly

scrimmage in the deep shadow of the old trees, with no one to call

'time,' till, battered and blown, they unclinched and staggered back

from each other, as a voice said:

"Your names, young gentlemen?"

At this bland query spoken from under the lamp at the garden gate, like

some demand of a god, their nerves gave way, and snatching up their

coats, they ran at the railings, shinned up them, and made for the

secluded spot whence they had issued to the fight. Here, in dim light,

they mopped their faces, and without a word walked, ten paces apart, to

the college gate. They went out silently, Val going towards the Broad

along the Brewery, Jolly down the lane towards the High. His head, still

fumed, was busy with regret that he had not displayed more science,

passing in review the counters and knockout blows which he had not

delivered. His mind strayed on to an imagined combat, infinitely unlike

that which he had just been through, infinitely gallant, with sash and

sword, with thrust and parry, as if he were in the pages of his beloved

Dumas. He fancied himself La Mole, and Aramis, Bussy, Chicot, and

D'Artagnan rolled into one, but he quite failed to envisage Val as

Coconnas, Brissac, or Rochefort. The fellow was just a confounded cousin

who didn't come up to Cocker. Never mind! He had given him one or two.

'Pro-Boer!' The word still rankled, and thoughts of enlisting jostled

his aching head; of riding over the veldt, firing gallantly, while the

Boers rolled over like rabbits. And, turning up his smarting eyes, he

saw the stars shining between the housetops of the High, and himself

lying out on the Karoo (whatever that was) rolled in a blanket, with his

rifle ready and his gaze fixed on a glittering heaven.

He had a fearful 'head' next morning, which he doctored, as became one

of 'the best,' by soaking it in cold water, brewing strong coffee which

he could not drink, and only sipping a little Hock at lunch. The legend

that 'some fool' had run into him round a corner accounted for a bruise

on his cheek. He would on no account have mentioned the fight, for, on

second thoughts, it fell far short of his standards.

The next day he went 'down,' and travelled through to Robin Hill. Nobody

was there but June and Holly, for his father had gone to Paris. He spent

a restless and unsettled Vacation, quite out of touch with either of his

sisters. June, indeed, was occupied with lame ducks, whom, as a rule,

Jolly could not stand, especially that Eric Cobbley and his family,

'hopeless outsiders,' who were always littering up the house in the

Vacation. And between Holly and himself there was a strange division,

as if she were beginning to have opinions of her own, which was

so--unnecessary. He punched viciously at a ball, rode furiously but

alone in Richmond Park, making a point of jumping the stiff, high

hurdles put up to close certain worn avenues of grass--keeping his nerve

in, he called it. Jolly was more afraid of being afraid than most boys

are. He bought a rifle, too, and put a range up in the home field,

shooting across the pond into the kitchen-garden wall, to the peril of

gardeners, with the thought that some day, perhaps, he would enlist and

save South Africa for his country. In fact, now that they were appealing

for Yeomanry recruits the boy was thoroughly upset. Ought he to go?

None of 'the best,' so far as he knew--and he was in correspondence with

several--were thinking of joining. If they had been making a move he

would have gone at once--very competitive, and with a strong sense of

form, he could not bear to be left behind in anything--but to do it

off his own bat might look like 'swagger'; because of course it wasn't

really necessary. Besides, he did not want to go, for the other side

of this young Forsyte recoiled from leaping before he looked. It was

altogether mixed pickles within him, hot and sickly pickles, and he

became quite unlike his serene and rather lordly self.

And then one day he saw that which moved him to uneasy wrath--two

riders, in a glade of the Park close to the Ham Gate, of whom she on

the left-hand was most assuredly Holly on her silver roan, and he on the

right-hand as assuredly that 'squirt' Val Dartie. His first impulse was

to urge on his own horse and demand the meaning of this portent, tell

the fellow to 'bunk,' and take Holly home. His second--to feel that he

would look a fool if they refused. He reined his horse in behind a tree,

then perceived that it was equally impossible to spy on them. Nothing

for it but to go home and await her coming! Sneaking out with that young

bounder! He could not consult with June, because she had gone up that

morning in the train of Eric Cobbley and his lot. And his father was

still in 'that rotten Paris.' He felt that this was emphatically one of

those moments for which he had trained himself, assiduously, at school,

where he and a boy called Brent had frequently set fire to newspapers

and placed them in the centre of their studies to accustom them to

coolness in moments of danger. He did not feel at all cool waiting in

the stable-yard, idly stroking the dog Balthasar, who queasy as an old

fat monk, and sad in the absence of his master, turned up his face,

panting with gratitude for this attention. It was half an hour before

Holly came, flushed and ever so much prettier than she had any right to

look. He saw her look at him quickly--guiltily of course--then followed

her in, and, taking her arm, conducted her into what had been their

grandfather's study. The room, not much used now, was still vaguely

haunted for them both by a presence with which they associated

tenderness, large drooping white moustaches, the scent of cigar smoke,

and laughter. Here Jolly, in the prime of his youth, before he went to

school at all, had been wont to wrestle with his grandfather, who even

at eighty had an irresistible habit of crooking his leg. Here Holly,

perched on the arm of the great leather chair, had stroked hair curving

silvery over an ear into which she would whisper secrets. Through that

window they had all three sallied times without number to cricket on the

lawn, and a mysterious game called 'Wopsy-doozle,' not to be understood

by outsiders, which made old Jolyon very hot. Here once on a warm night

Holly had appeared in her 'nighty,' having had a bad dream, to have the

clutch of it released. And here Jolly, having begun the day badly by

introducing fizzy magnesia into Mademoiselle Beauce's new-laid egg, and

gone on to worse, had been sent down (in the absence of his father) to

the ensuing dialogue:

"Now, my boy, you mustn't go on like this."

"Well, she boxed my ears, Gran, so I only boxed hers, and then she boxed

mine again."

"Strike a lady? That'll never do! Have you begged her pardon?"

"Not yet."

"Then you must go and do it at once. Come along."

"But she began it, Gran; and she had two to my one."

"My dear, it was an outrageous thing to do."

"Well, she lost her temper; and I didn't lose mine."

"Come along."

"You come too, then, Gran."

"Well--this time only."

And they had gone hand in hand.

Here--where the Waverley novels and Byron's works and Gibbon's Roman

Empire and Humboldt's Cosmos, and the bronzes on the mantelpiece, and

that masterpiece of the oily school, 'Dutch Fishing-Boats at Sunset,'

were fixed as fate, and for all sign of change old Jolyon might have

been sitting there still, with legs crossed, in the arm chair, and domed

forehead and deep eyes grave above The Times--here they came, those two

grandchildren. And Jolly said:

"I saw you and that fellow in the Park."

The sight of blood rushing into her cheeks gave him some satisfaction;

she ought to be ashamed!

"Well?" she said.

Jolly was surprised; he had expected more, or less.

"Do you know," he said weightily, "that he called me a pro-Boer last

term? And I had to fight him."

"Who won?"

Jolly wished to answer: 'I should have,' but it seemed beneath him.

"Look here!" he said, "what's the meaning of it? Without telling

anybody!"

"Why should I? Dad isn't here; why shouldn't I ride with him?"

"You've got me to ride with. I think he's an awful young rotter."

Holly went pale with anger.

"He isn't. It's your own fault for not liking him."

And slipping past her brother she went out, leaving him staring at the

bronze Venus sitting on a tortoise, which had been shielded from him so

far by his sister's dark head under her soft felt riding hat. He

felt queerly disturbed, shaken to his young foundations. A lifelong

domination lay shattered round his feet. He went up to the Venus and

mechanically inspected the tortoise.

Why didn't he like Val Dartie? He could not tell. Ignorant of family

history, barely aware of that vague feud which had started thirteen

years before with Bosinney's defection from June in favour of Soames'

wife, knowing really almost nothing about Val he was at sea. He just did

dislike him. The question, however, was: What should he do? Val Dartie,

it was true, was a second-cousin, but it was not the thing for Holly

to go about with him. And yet to 'tell' of what he had chanced on was

against his creed. In this dilemma he went and sat in the old leather

chair and crossed his legs. It grew dark while he sat there staring out

through the long window at the old oak-tree, ample yet bare of leaves,

becoming slowly just a shape of deeper dark printed on the dusk.

'Grandfather!' he thought without sequence, and took out his watch. He

could not see the hands, but he set the repeater going. 'Five o'clock!'

His grandfather's first gold hunter watch, butter-smooth with age--all

the milling worn from it, and dented with the mark of many a fall. The

chime was like a little voice from out of that golden age, when they

first came from St. John's Wood, London, to this house--came driving

with grandfather in his carriage, and almost instantly took to the

trees. Trees to climb, and grandfather watering the geranium-beds below!

What was to be done? Tell Dad he must come home? Confide in June?--only

she was so--so sudden! Do nothing and trust to luck? After all, the Vac.

would soon be over. Go up and see Val and warn him off? But how get

his address? Holly wouldn't give it him! A maze of paths, a cloud of

possibilities! He lit a cigarette. When he had smoked it halfway through

his brow relaxed, almost as if some thin old hand had been passed gently

over it; and in his ear something seemed to whisper: 'Do nothing; be

nice to Holly, be nice to her, my dear!' And Jolly heaved a sigh of

contentment, blowing smoke through his nostrils....

But up in her room, divested of her habit, Holly was still frowning. 'He

is not--he is not!' were the words which kept forming on her lips.

CHAPTER VI--JOLYON IN TWO MINDS

A little private hotel over a well-known restaurant near the Gare

St. Lazare was Jolyon's haunt in Paris. He hated his fellow Forsytes

abroad--vapid as fish out of water in their well-trodden runs, the

Opera, Rue de Rivoli, and Moulin Rouge. Their air of having come because

they wanted to be somewhere else as soon as possible annoyed him. But

no other Forsyte came near this haunt, where he had a wood fire in

his bedroom and the coffee was excellent. Paris was always to him

more attractive in winter. The acrid savour from woodsmoke and

chestnut-roasting braziers, the sharpness of the wintry sunshine

on bright rays, the open cafes defying keen-aired winter, the

self-contained brisk boulevard crowds, all informed him that in winter

Paris possessed a soul which, like a migrant bird, in high summer flew

away.

He spoke French well, had some friends, knew little places where

pleasant dishes could be met with, queer types observed. He felt

philosophic in Paris, the edge of irony sharpened; life took on a

subtle, purposeless meaning, became a bunch of flavours tasted, a

darkness shot with shifting gleams of light.

When in the first week of December he decided to go to Paris, he was

far from admitting that Irene's presence was influencing him. He had not

been there two days before he owned that the wish to see her had

been more than half the reason. In England one did not admit what was

natural. He had thought it might be well to speak to her about the

letting of her flat and other matters, but in Paris he at once knew

better. There was a glamour over the city. On the third day he wrote to

her, and received an answer which procured him a pleasurable shiver of

the nerves:

"MY DEAR JOLYON,

"It will be a happiness for me to see you.

"IRENE."

He took his way to her hotel on a bright day with a feeling such as he

had often had going to visit an adored picture. No woman, so far as

he remembered, had ever inspired in him this special sensuous and yet

impersonal sensation. He was going to sit and feast his eyes, and come

away knowing her no better, but ready to go and feast his eyes again

to-morrow. Such was his feeling, when in the tarnished and ornate little

lounge of a quiet hotel near the river she came to him preceded by a

small page-boy who uttered the word, "Madame," and vanished. Her face,

her smile, the poise of her figure, were just as he had pictured, and

the expression of her face said plainly: 'A friend!'

"Well," he said, "what news, poor exile?"

"None."

"Nothing from Soames?"

"Nothing."

"I have let the flat for you, and like a good steward I bring you some

money. How do you like Paris?"

While he put her through this catechism, it seemed to him that he had

never seen lips so fine and sensitive, the lower lip curving just a

little upwards, the upper touched at one corner by the least conceivable

dimple. It was like discovering a woman in what had hitherto been a sort

of soft and breathed-on statue, almost impersonally admired. She owned

that to be alone in Paris was a little difficult; and yet, Paris was so

full of its own life that it was often, she confessed, as innocuous as a

desert. Besides, the English were not liked just now!

"That will hardly be your case," said Jolyon; "you should appeal to the

French."

"It has its disadvantages."

Jolyon nodded.

"Well, you must let me take you about while I'm here. We'll start

to-morrow. Come and dine at my pet restaurant; and we'll go to the

Opera-Comique."

It was the beginning of daily meetings.

Jolyon soon found that for those who desired a static condition of the

affections, Paris was at once the first and last place in which to be

friendly with a pretty woman. Revelation was alighting like a bird in

his heart, singing: 'Elle est ton reve! Elle est ton reve! Sometimes

this seemed natural, sometimes ludicrous--a bad case of elderly rapture.

Having once been ostracised by Society, he had never since had any real

regard for conventional morality; but the idea of a love which she could

never return--and how could she at his age?--hardly mounted beyond his

subconscious mind. He was full, too, of resentment, at the waste and

loneliness of her life. Aware of being some comfort to her, and of the

pleasure she clearly took in their many little outings, he was amiably

desirous of doing and saying nothing to destroy that pleasure. It was

like watching a starved plant draw up water, to see her drink in his

companionship. So far as they could tell, no one knew her address except

himself; she was unknown in Paris, and he but little known, so that

discretion seemed unnecessary in those walks, talks, visits to concerts,

picture-galleries, theatres, little dinners, expeditions to Versailles,

St. Cloud, even Fontainebleau. And time fled--one of those full months

without past to it or future. What in his youth would certainly have

been headlong passion, was now perhaps as deep a feeling, but

far gentler, tempered to protective companionship by admiration,

hopelessness, and a sense of chivalry--arrested in his veins at least so

long as she was there, smiling and happy in their friendship, and always

to him more beautiful and spiritually responsive: for her philosophy

of life seemed to march in admirable step with his own, conditioned

by emotion more than by reason, ironically mistrustful, susceptible

to beauty, almost passionately humane and tolerant, yet subject to

instinctive rigidities of which as a mere man he was less capable. And

during all this companionable month he never quite lost that feeling

with which he had set out on the first day as if to visit an adored work

of art, a well-nigh impersonal desire. The future--inexorable pendant

to the present he took care not to face, for fear of breaking up his

untroubled manner; but he made plans to renew this time in places still

more delightful, where the sun was hot and there were strange things

to see and paint. The end came swiftly on the 20th of January with a

telegram:

"Have enlisted in Imperial Yeomanry. JOLLY."

Jolyon received it just as he was setting out to meet her at the Louvre.

It brought him up with a round turn. While he was lotus-eating here, his

boy, whose philosopher and guide he ought to be, had taken this great

step towards danger, hardship, perhaps even death. He felt disturbed

to the soul, realising suddenly how Irene had twined herself round the

roots of his being. Thus threatened with severance, the tie between

them--for it had become a kind of tie--no longer had impersonal quality.

The tranquil enjoyment of things in common, Jolyon perceived, was gone

for ever. He saw his feeling as it was, in the nature of an infatuation.

Ridiculous, perhaps, but so real that sooner or later it must disclose

itself. And now, as it seemed to him, he could not, must not, make any

such disclosure. The news of Jolly stood inexorably in the way. He was

proud of this enlistment; proud of his boy for going off to fight for

the country; for on Jolyon's pro-Boerism, too, Black Week had left its

mark. And so the end was reached before the beginning! Well, luckily he

had never made a sign!

When he came into the Gallery she was standing before the 'Virgin of the

Rocks,' graceful, absorbed, smiling and unconscious. 'Have I to give up

seeing that?' he thought. 'It's unnatural, so long as she's willing that

I should see her.' He stood, unnoticed, watching her, storing up the

image of her figure, envying the picture on which she was bending that

long scrutiny. Twice she turned her head towards the entrance, and he

thought: 'That's for me!' At last he went forward.

"Look!" he said.

She read the telegram, and he heard her sigh.

That sigh, too, was for him! His position was really cruel! To be

loyal to his son he must just shake her hand and go. To be loyal to the

feeling in his heart he must at least tell her what that feeling was.

Could she, would she understand the silence in which he was gazing at

that picture?

"I'm afraid I must go home at once," he said at last. "I shall miss all

this awfully."

"So shall I; but, of course, you must go."

"Well!" said Jolyon holding out his hand.

Meeting her eyes, a flood of feeling nearly mastered him.

"Such is life!" he said. "Take care of yourself, my dear!"

He had a stumbling sensation in his legs and feet, as if his brain

refused to steer him away from her. From the doorway, he saw her

lift her hand and touch its fingers with her lips. He raised his hat

solemnly, and did not look back again.

CHAPTER VII--DARTIE VERSUS DARTIE

The suit--Dartie versus Dartie--for restitution of those conjugal rights

concerning which Winifred was at heart so deeply undecided, followed the

laws of subtraction towards day of judgment. This was not reached before

the Courts rose for Christmas, but the case was third on the list when

they sat again. Winifred spent the Christmas holidays a thought more

fashionably than usual, with the matter locked up in her low-cut bosom.

James was particularly liberal to her that Christmas, expressing thereby

his sympathy, and relief, at the approaching dissolution of her marriage

with that 'precious rascal,' which his old heart felt but his old lips

could not utter.

The disappearance of Dartie made the fall in Consols a comparatively

small matter; and as to the scandal--the real animus he felt against

that fellow, and the increasing lead which property was attaining over

reputation in a true Forsyte about to leave this world, served to drug

a mind from which all allusions to the matter (except his own) were

studiously kept. What worried him as a lawyer and a parent was the fear

that Dartie might suddenly turn up and obey the Order of the Court when

made. That would be a pretty how-de-do! The fear preyed on him in fact

so much that, in presenting Winifred with a large Christmas cheque, he

said: "It's chiefly for that chap out there; to keep him from coming

back." It was, of course, to pitch away good money, but all in the

nature of insurance against that bankruptcy which would no longer hang

over him if only the divorce went through; and he questioned Winifred

rigorously until she could assure him that the money had been sent. Poor

woman!--it cost her many a pang to send what must find its way into the

vanity-bag of 'that creature!' Soames, hearing of it, shook his head.

They were not dealing with a Forsyte, reasonably tenacious of his

purpose. It was very risky without knowing how the land lay out there.

Still, it would look well with the Court; and he would see that Dreamer

brought it out. "I wonder," he said suddenly, "where that ballet goes

after the Argentine"; never omitting a chance of reminder; for he knew

that Winifred still had a weakness, if not for Dartie, at least for

not laundering him in public. Though not good at showing admiration, he

admitted that she was behaving extremely well, with all her children at

home gaping like young birds for news of their father--Imogen just on

the point of coming out, and Val very restive about the whole thing.

He felt that Val was the real heart of the matter to Winifred, who

certainly loved him beyond her other children. The boy could spoke the

wheel of this divorce yet if he set his mind to it. And Soames was very

careful to keep the proximity of the preliminary proceedings from his

nephew's ears. He did more. He asked him to dine at the Remove, and over

Val's cigar introduced the subject which he knew to be nearest to his

heart.

"I hear," he said, "that you want to play polo up at Oxford."

Val became less recumbent in his chair.

"Rather!" he said.

"Well," continued Soames, "that's a very expensive business. Your

grandfather isn't likely to consent to it unless he can make sure that

he's not got any other drain on him." And he paused to see whether the

boy understood his meaning.

Val's thick dark lashes concealed his eyes, but a slight grimace

appeared on his wide mouth, and he muttered:

"I suppose you mean my Dad!"

"Yes," said Soames; "I'm afraid it depends on whether he continues to be

a drag or not;" and said no more, letting the boy dream it over.

But Val was also dreaming in those days of a silver-roan palfrey and a

girl riding it. Though Crum was in town and an introduction to Cynthia

Dark to be had for the asking, Val did not ask; indeed, he shunned Crum

and lived a life strange even to himself, except in so far as accounts

with tailor and livery stable were concerned. To his mother, his

sisters, his young brother, he seemed to spend this Vacation in 'seeing

fellows,' and his evenings sleepily at home. They could not propose

anything in daylight that did not meet with the one response: "Sorry;

I've got to see a fellow"; and he was put to extraordinary shifts to get

in and out of the house unobserved in riding clothes; until, being made

a member of the Goat's Club, he was able to transport them there, where

he could change unregarded and slip off on his hack to Richmond Park. He

kept his growing sentiment religiously to himself. Not for a world

would he breathe to the 'fellows,' whom he was not 'seeing,' anything so

ridiculous from the point of view of their creed and his. But he could

not help its destroying his other appetites. It was coming between him

and the legitimate pleasures of youth at last on its own in a way which

must, he knew, make him a milksop in the eyes of Crum. All he cared

for was to dress in his last-created riding togs, and steal away to the

Robin Hill Gate, where presently the silver roan would come demurely

sidling with its slim and dark-haired rider, and in the glades bare of

leaves they would go off side by side, not talking very much, riding

races sometimes, and sometimes holding hands. More than once of an

evening, in a moment of expansion, he had been tempted to tell his

mother how this shy sweet cousin had stolen in upon him and wrecked his

'life.' But bitter experience, that all persons above thirty-five were

spoil-sports, prevented him. After all, he supposed he would have to

go through with College, and she would have to 'come out,' before they

could be married; so why complicate things, so long as he could see her?

Sisters were teasing and unsympathetic beings, a brother worse, so there

was no one to confide in. Ah! And this beastly divorce business! What a

misfortune to have a name which other people hadn't! If only he had

been called Gordon or Scott or Howard or something fairly common! But

Dartie--there wasn't another in the directory! One might as well have

been named Morkin for all the covert it afforded! So matters went on,

till one day in the middle of January the silver-roan palfrey and its

rider were missing at the tryst. Lingering in the cold, he debated

whether he should ride on to the house: But Jolly might be there, and

the memory of their dark encounter was still fresh within him. One could

not be always fighting with her brother! So he returned dismally to town

and spent an evening plunged in gloom. At breakfast next day he noticed

that his mother had on an unfamiliar dress and was wearing her hat.

The dress was black with a glimpse of peacock blue, the hat black and

large--she looked exceptionally well. But when after breakfast she said

to him, "Come in here, Val," and led the way to the drawing-room, he was

at once beset by qualms. Winifred carefully shut the door and passed her

handkerchief over her lips; inhaling the violette de Parme with which it

had been soaked, Val thought: 'Has she found out about Holly?'

Her voice interrupted

"Are you going to be nice to me, dear boy?"

Val grinned doubtfully.

"Will you come with me this morning...."

"I've got to see...." began Val, but something in her face stopped him.

"I say," he said, "you don't mean...."

"Yes, I have to go to the Court this morning." Already!--that d---d

business which he had almost succeeded in forgetting, since nobody ever

mentioned it. In self-commiseration he stood picking little bits of skin

off his fingers. Then noticing that his mother's lips were all awry,

he said impulsively: "All right, mother; I'll come. The brutes!" What

brutes he did not know, but the expression exactly summed up their joint

feeling, and restored a measure of equanimity.

"I suppose I'd better change into a 'shooter,"' he muttered, escaping to

his room. He put on the 'shooter,' a higher collar, a pearl pin, and his

neatest grey spats, to a somewhat blasphemous accompaniment. Looking at

himself in the glass, he said, "Well, I'm damned if I'm going to show

anything!" and went down. He found his grandfather's carriage at the

door, and his mother in furs, with the appearance of one going to a

Mansion House Assembly. They seated themselves side by side in the

closed barouche, and all the way to the Courts of Justice Val made but

one allusion to the business in hand. "There'll be nothing about those

pearls, will there?"

The little tufted white tails of Winifred's muff began to shiver.

"Oh, no," she said, "it'll be quite harmless to-day. Your grandmother

wanted to come too, but I wouldn't let her. I thought you could take

care of me. You look so nice, Val. Just pull your coat collar up a

little more at the back--that's right."

"If they bully you...." began Val.

"Oh! they won't. I shall be very cool. It's the only way."

"They won't want me to give evidence or anything?"

"No, dear; it's all arranged." And she patted his hand. The determined

front she was putting on it stayed the turmoil in Val's chest, and he

busied himself in drawing his gloves off and on. He had taken what he

now saw was the wrong pair to go with his spats; they should have been

grey, but were deerskin of a dark tan; whether to keep them on or not he

could not decide. They arrived soon after ten. It was his first visit to

the Law Courts, and the building struck him at once.

"By Jove!" he said as they passed into the hall, "this'd make four or

five jolly good racket courts."

Soames was awaiting them at the foot of some stairs.

"Here you are!" he said, without shaking hands, as if the event had made

them too familiar for such formalities. "It's Happerly Browne, Court I.

We shall be on first."

A sensation such as he had known when going in to bat was playing now in

the top of Val's chest, but he followed his mother and uncle doggedly,

looking at no more than he could help, and thinking that the place

smelled 'fuggy.' People seemed to be lurking everywhere, and he plucked

Soames by the sleeve.

"I say, Uncle, you're not going to let those beastly papers in, are

you?"

Soames gave him the sideway look which had reduced many to silence in

its time.

"In here," he said. "You needn't take off your furs, Winifred."

Val entered behind them, nettled and with his head up. In this

confounded hole everybody--and there were a good many of them--seemed

sitting on everybody else's knee, though really divided from each other

by pews; and Val had a feeling that they might all slip down together

into the well. This, however, was but a momentary vision--of mahogany,

and black gowns, and white blobs of wigs and faces and papers, all

rather secret and whispery--before he was sitting next his mother in the

front row, with his back to it all, glad of her violette de Parme, and

taking off his gloves for the last time. His mother was looking at him;

he was suddenly conscious that she had really wanted him there next to

her, and that he counted for something in this business.

All right! He would show them! Squaring his shoulders, he crossed his

legs and gazed inscrutably at his spats. But just then an 'old Johnny'

in a gown and long wig, looking awfully like a funny raddled woman, came

through a door into the high pew opposite, and he had to uncross his

legs hastily, and stand up with everybody else.

'Dartie versus Dartie!'

It seemed to Val unspeakably disgusting to have one's name called out

like this in public! And, suddenly conscious that someone nearly behind

him had begun talking about his family, he screwed his face round to

see an old be-wigged buffer, who spoke as if he were eating his own

words--queer-looking old cuss, the sort of man he had seen once or twice

dining at Park Lane and punishing the port; he knew now where they 'dug

them up.' All the same he found the old buffer quite fascinating, and

would have continued to stare if his mother had not touched his arm.

Reduced to gazing before him, he fixed his eyes on the Judge's face

instead. Why should that old 'sportsman' with his sarcastic mouth

and his quick-moving eyes have the power to meddle with their private

affairs--hadn't he affairs of his own, just as many, and probably just

as nasty? And there moved in Val, like an illness, all the deep-seated

individualism of his breed. The voice behind him droned along:

"Differences about money matters--extravagance of the respondent" (What

a word! Was that his father?)--"strained situation--frequent absences

on the part of Mr. Dartie. My client, very rightly, your

Ludship will agree, was anxious to check a course--but lead to

ruin--remonstrated--gambling at cards and on the racecourse--" ('That's

right!' thought Val, 'pile it on!') "Crisis early in October, when the

respondent wrote her this letter from his Club." Val sat up and his

ears burned. "I propose to read it with the emendations necessary to the

epistle of a gentleman who has been--shall we say dining, me Lud?"

'Old brute!' thought Val, flushing deeper; 'you're not paid to make

jokes!'

"'You will not get the chance to insult me again in my own house. I am

leaving the country to-morrow. It's played out'--an expression, your

Ludship, not unknown in the mouths of those who have not met with

conspicuous success."

'Sniggering owls!' thought Val, and his flush deepened.

"'I am tired of being insulted by you.' My client will tell your

Ludship that these so-called insults consisted in her calling him

'the limit',--a very mild expression, I venture to suggest, in all the

circumstances."

Val glanced sideways at his mother's impassive face, it had a hunted

look in the eyes. 'Poor mother,' he thought, and touched her arm with

his own. The voice behind droned on.

"'I am going to live a new life. M. D.'"

"And next day, me Lud, the respondent left by the steamship Tuscarora

for Buenos Aires. Since then we have nothing from him but a cabled

refusal in answer to the letter which my client wrote the following day

in great distress, begging him to return to her. With your Ludship's

permission. I shall now put Mrs. Dartie in the box."

When his mother rose, Val had a tremendous impulse to rise too and say:

'Look here! I'm going to see you jolly well treat her decently.' He

subdued it, however; heard her saying, 'the truth, the whole truth, and

nothing but the truth,' and looked up. She made a rich figure of it, in

her furs and large hat, with a slight flush on her cheek-bones, calm,

matter-of-fact; and he felt proud of her thus confronting all these

'confounded lawyers.' The examination began. Knowing that this was

only the preliminary to divorce, Val followed with a certain glee the

questions framed so as to give the impression that she really wanted

his father back. It seemed to him that they were 'foxing Old Bagwigs

finely.'

And he received a most unpleasant jar when the Judge said suddenly:

"Now, why did your husband leave you--not because you called him 'the

limit,' you know?"

Val saw his uncle lift his eyes to the witness box, without moving his

face; heard a shuffle of papers behind him; and instinct told him that

the issue was in peril. Had Uncle Soames and the old buffer behind made

a mess of it? His mother was speaking with a slight drawl.

"No, my Lord, but it had gone on a long time."

"What had gone on?"

"Our differences about money."

"But you supplied the money. Do you suggest that he left you to better

his position?"

'The brute! The old brute, and nothing but the brute!' thought Val

suddenly. 'He smells a rat he's trying to get at the pastry!' And his

heart stood still. If--if he did, then, of course, he would know that

his mother didn't really want his father back. His mother spoke again, a

thought more fashionably.

"No, my Lord, but you see I had refused to give him any more money. It

took him a long time to believe that, but he did at last--and when he

did...."

"I see, you had refused. But you've sent him some since."

"My Lord, I wanted him back."

"And you thought that would bring him?"

"I don't know, my Lord, I acted on my father's advice."

Something in the Judge's face, in the sound of the papers behind him, in

the sudden crossing of his uncle's legs, told Val that she had made just

the right answer. 'Crafty!' he thought; 'by Jove, what humbug it all

is!'

The Judge was speaking:

"Just one more question, Mrs. Dartie. Are you still fond of your

husband?"

Val's hands, slack behind him, became fists. What business had that

Judge to make things human suddenly? To make his mother speak out of her

heart, and say what, perhaps, she didn't know herself, before all these

people! It wasn't decent. His mother answered, rather low: "Yes, my

Lord." Val saw the Judge nod. 'Wish I could take a cock-shy at your

head!' he thought irreverently, as his mother came back to her seat

beside him. Witnesses to his father's departure and continued absence

followed--one of their own maids even, which struck Val as particularly

beastly; there was more talking, all humbug; and then the Judge

pronounced the decree for restitution, and they got up to go. Val walked

out behind his mother, chin squared, eyelids drooped, doing his level

best to despise everybody. His mother's voice in the corridor roused him

from an angry trance.

"You behaved beautifully, dear. It was such a comfort to have you. Your

uncle and I are going to lunch."

"All right," said Val; "I shall have time to go and see that fellow."

And, parting from them abruptly, he ran down the stairs and out into the

air. He bolted into a hansom, and drove to the Goat's Club. His thoughts

were on Holly and what he must do before her brother showed her this

thing in to-morrow's paper.

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When Val had left them Soames and Winifred made their way to the

Cheshire Cheese. He had suggested it as a meeting place with Mr.

Bellby. At that early hour of noon they would have it to themselves,

and Winifred had thought it would be 'amusing' to see this far-famed

hostelry. Having ordered a light repast, to the consternation of the

waiter, they awaited its arrival together with that of Mr. Bellby, in

silent reaction after the hour and a half's suspense on the tenterhooks

of publicity. Mr. Bellby entered presently, preceded by his nose,

as cheerful as they were glum. Well! they had got the decree of

restitution, and what was the matter with that!

"Quite," said Soames in a suitably low voice, "but we shall have to

begin again to get evidence. He'll probably try the divorce--it will

look fishy if it comes out that we knew of misconduct from the start.

His questions showed well enough that he doesn't like this restitution

dodge."

"Pho!" said Mr. Bellby cheerily, "he'll forget! Why, man, he'll have

tried a hundred cases between now and then. Besides, he's bound by

precedent to give ye your divorce, if the evidence is satisfactory. We

won't let um know that Mrs. Dartie had knowledge of the facts. Dreamer

did it very nicely--he's got a fatherly touch about um!"

Soames nodded.

"And I compliment ye, Mrs. Dartie," went on Mr. Bellby; "ye've a natural

gift for giving evidence. Steady as a rock."

Here the waiter arrived with three plates balanced on one arm, and the

remark: "I 'urried up the pudden, sir. You'll find plenty o' lark in it

to-day."

Mr. Bellby applauded his forethought with a dip of his nose. But Soames

and Winifred looked with dismay at their light lunch of gravified

brown masses, touching them gingerly with their forks in the hope of

distinguishing the bodies of the tasty little song-givers. Having begun,

however, they found they were hungrier than they thought, and finished

the lot, with a glass of port apiece. Conversation turned on the war.

Soames thought Ladysmith would fall, and it might last a year. Bellby

thought it would be over by the summer. Both agreed that they wanted

more men. There was nothing for it but complete victory, since it was

now a question of prestige. Winifred brought things back to more solid

ground by saying that she did not want the divorce suit to come on till

after the summer holidays had begun at Oxford, then the boys would have

forgotten about it before Val had to go up again; the London season too

would be over. The lawyers reassured her, an interval of six months was

necessary--after that the earlier the better. People were now beginning

to come in, and they parted--Soames to the city, Bellby to his chambers,

Winifred in a hansom to Park Lane to let her mother know how she had

fared. The issue had been so satisfactory on the whole that it was

considered advisable to tell James, who never failed to say day after

day that he didn't know about Winifred's affair, he couldn't tell. As

his sands ran out; the importance of mundane matters became increasingly

grave to him, as if he were feeling: 'I must make the most of it, and

worry well; I shall soon have nothing to worry about.'

He received the report grudgingly. It was a new-fangled way of going

about things, and he didn't know! But he gave Winifred a cheque, saying:

"I expect you'll have a lot of expense. That's a new hat you've got on.

Why doesn't Val come and see us?"

Winifred promised to bring him to dinner soon. And, going home, she

sought her bedroom where she could be alone. Now that her husband had

been ordered back into her custody with a view to putting him away from

her for ever, she would try once more to find out from her sore and

lonely heart what she really wanted.

CHAPTER VIII--THE CHALLENGE

The morning had been misty, verging on frost, but the sun came out while

Val was jogging towards the Roehampton Gate, whence he would canter

on to the usual tryst. His spirits were rising rapidly. There had been

nothing so very terrible in the morning's proceedings beyond the general

disgrace of violated privacy. 'If we were engaged!' he thought, 'what

happens wouldn't matter.' He felt, indeed, like human society, which

kicks and clamours at the results of matrimony, and hastens to get

married. And he galloped over the winter-dried grass of Richmond Park,

fearing to be late. But again he was alone at the trysting spot, and

this second defection on the part of Holly upset him dreadfully. He

could not go back without seeing her to-day! Emerging from the Park, he

proceeded towards Robin Hill. He could not make up his mind for whom to

ask. Suppose her father were back, or her sister or brother were in!

He decided to gamble, and ask for them all first, so that if he were in

luck and they were not there, it would be quite natural in the end to

ask for Holly; while if any of them were in--an 'excuse for a ride' must

be his saving grace.

"Only Miss Holly is in, sir."

"Oh! thanks. Might I take my horse round to the stables? And would you

say--her cousin, Mr. Val Dartie."

When he returned she was in the hall, very flushed and shy. She led him

to the far end, and they sat down on a wide window-seat.

"I've been awfully anxious," said Val in a low voice. "What's the

matter?"

"Jolly knows about our riding."

"Is he in?"

"No; but I expect he will be soon."

"Then!" cried Val, and diving forward, he seized her hand. She tried to

withdraw it, failed, gave up the attempt, and looked at him wistfully.

"First of all," he said, "I want to tell you something about my family.

My Dad, you know, isn't altogether--I mean, he's left my mother and

they're trying to divorce him; so they've ordered him to come back, you

see. You'll see that in the paper to-morrow."

Her eyes deepened in colour and fearful interest; her hand squeezed his.

But the gambler in Val was roused now, and he hurried on:

"Of course there's nothing very much at present, but there will be, I

expect, before it's over; divorce suits are beastly, you know. I wanted

to tell you, because--because--you ought to know--if--" and he began

to stammer, gazing at her troubled eyes, "if--if you're going to be

a darling and love me, Holly. I love you--ever so; and I want to be

engaged." He had done it in a manner so inadequate that he could have

punched his own head; and dropping on his knees, he tried to get nearer

to that soft, troubled face. "You do love me--don't you? If you don't

I...." There was a moment of silence and suspense, so awful that he

could hear the sound of a mowing-machine far out on the lawn pretending

there was grass to cut. Then she swayed forward; her free hand touched

his hair, and he gasped: "Oh, Holly!"

Her answer was very soft: "Oh, Val!"

He had dreamed of this moment, but always in an imperative mood, as the

masterful young lover, and now he felt humble, touched, trembly. He was

afraid to stir off his knees lest he should break the spell; lest, if he

did, she should shrink and deny her own surrender--so tremulous was she

in his grasp, with her eyelids closed and his lips nearing them. Her

eyes opened, seemed to swim a little; he pressed his lips to hers.

Suddenly he sprang up; there had been footsteps, a sort of startled

grunt. He looked round. No one! But the long curtains which barred off

the outer hall were quivering.

"My God! Who was that?"

Holly too was on her feet.

"Jolly, I expect," she whispered.

Val clenched fists and resolution.

"All right!" he said, "I don't care a bit now we're engaged," and

striding towards the curtains, he drew them aside. There at the

fireplace in the hall stood Jolly, with his back elaborately turned. Val

went forward. Jolly faced round on him.

"I beg your pardon for hearing," he said.

With the best intentions in the world, Val could not help admiring him

at that moment; his face was clear, his voice quiet, he looked somehow

distinguished, as if acting up to principle.

"Well!" Val said abruptly, "it's nothing to you."

"Oh!" said Jolly; "you come this way," and he crossed the hall. Val

followed. At the study door he felt a touch on his arm; Holly's voice

said:

"I'm coming too."

"No," said Jolly.

"Yes," said Holly.

Jolly opened the door, and they all three went in. Once in the little

room, they stood in a sort of triangle on three corners of the worn

Turkey carpet; awkwardly upright, not looking at each other, quite

incapable of seeing any humour in the situation.

Val broke the silence.

"Holly and I are engaged."

Jolly stepped back and leaned against the lintel of the window.

"This is our house," he said; "I'm not going to insult you in it. But my

father's away. I'm in charge of my sister. You've taken advantage of me.

"I didn't mean to," said Val hotly.

"I think you did," said Jolly. "If you hadn't meant to, you'd have

spoken to me, or waited for my father to come back."

"There were reasons," said Val.

"What reasons?"

"About my family--I've just told her. I wanted her to know before things

happen."

Jolly suddenly became less distinguished.

"You're kids," he said, "and you know you are.

"I am not a kid," said Val.

"You are--you're not twenty."

"Well, what are you?"

"I am twenty," said Jolly.

"Only just; anyway, I'm as good a man as you."

Jolly's face crimsoned, then clouded. Some struggle was evidently taking

place in him; and Val and Holly stared at him, so clearly was that

struggle marked; they could even hear him breathing. Then his face

cleared up and became oddly resolute.

"We'll see that," he said. "I dare you to do what I'm going to do."

"Dare me?"

Jolly smiled. "Yes," he said, "dare you; and I know very well you

won't."

A stab of misgiving shot through Val; this was riding very blind.

"I haven't forgotten that you're a fire-eater," said Jolly slowly, "and

I think that's about all you are; or that you called me a pro-Boer."

Val heard a gasp above the sound of his own hard breathing, and saw

Holly's face poked a little forward, very pale, with big eyes.

"Yes," went on Jolly with a sort of smile, "we shall soon see. I'm going

to join the Imperial Yeomanry, and I dare you to do the same, Mr. Val

Dartie."

Val's head jerked on its stem. It was like a blow between the eyes, so

utterly unthought of, so extreme and ugly in the midst of his dreaming;

and he looked at Holly with eyes grown suddenly, touchingly haggard.

"Sit down!" said Jolly. "Take your time! Think it over well." And he

himself sat down on the arm of his grandfather's chair.

Val did not sit down; he stood with hands thrust deep into his breeches'

pockets-hands clenched and quivering. The full awfulness of this

decision one way or the other knocked at his mind with double knocks as

of an angry postman. If he did not take that 'dare' he was disgraced

in Holly's eyes, and in the eyes of that young enemy, her brute of a

brother. Yet if he took it, ah! then all would vanish--her face, her

eyes, her hair, her kisses just begun!

"Take your time," said Jolly again; "I don't want to be unfair."

And they both looked at Holly. She had recoiled against the bookshelves

reaching to the ceiling; her dark head leaned against Gibbon's Roman

Empire, her eyes in a sort of soft grey agony were fixed on Val. And he,

who had not much gift of insight, had suddenly a gleam of vision. She

would be proud of her brother--that enemy! She would be ashamed of him!

His hands came out of his pockets as if lifted by a spring.

"All right!" he said. "Done!"

Holly's face--oh! it was queer! He saw her flush, start forward. He

had done the right thing--her face was shining with wistful admiration.

Jolly stood up and made a little bow as who should say: 'You've passed.'

"To-morrow, then," he said, "we'll go together."

Recovering from the impetus which had carried him to that decision,

Val looked at him maliciously from under his lashes. 'All right,' he

thought, 'one to you. I shall have to join--but I'll get back on you

somehow.' And he said with dignity: "I shall be ready."

"We'll meet at the main Recruiting Office, then," said Jolly, "at

twelve o'clock." And, opening the window, he went out on to the terrace,

conforming to the creed which had made him retire when he surprised them

in the hall.

The confusion in the mind of Val thus left alone with her for whom he

had paid this sudden price was extreme. The mood of 'showing-off' was

still, however, uppermost. One must do the wretched thing with an air.

"We shall get plenty of riding and shooting, anyway," he said; "that's

one comfort." And it gave him a sort of grim pleasure to hear the sigh

which seemed to come from the bottom of her heart.

"Oh! the war'll soon be over," he said; "perhaps we shan't even have

to go out. I don't care, except for you." He would be out of the way

of that beastly divorce. It was an ill-wind! He felt her warm hand slip

into his. Jolly thought he had stopped their loving each other, did he?

He held her tightly round the waist, looking at her softly through his

lashes, smiling to cheer her up, promising to come down and see her

soon, feeling somehow six inches taller and much more in command of her

than he had ever dared feel before. Many times he kissed her before he

mounted and rode back to town. So, swiftly, on the least provocation,

does the possessive instinct flourish and grow.

CHAPTER IX--DINNER AT JAMES'

Dinner parties were not now given at James' in Park Lane--to every house

the moment comes when Master or Mistress is no longer 'up to it'; no

more can nine courses be served to twenty mouths above twenty fine

white expanses; nor does the household cat any longer wonder why she is

suddenly shut up.

So with something like excitement Emily--who at seventy would still have

liked a little feast and fashion now and then--ordered dinner for six

instead of two, herself wrote a number of foreign words on cards, and

arranged the flowers--mimosa from the Riviera, and white Roman hyacinths

not from Rome. There would only be, of course, James and herself,

Soames, Winifred, Val, and Imogen--but she liked to pretend a little and

dally in imagination with the glory of the past. She so dressed herself

that James remarked:

"What are you putting on that thing for? You'll catch cold."

But Emily knew that the necks of women are protected by love of shining,

unto fourscore years, and she only answered:

"Let me put you on one of those dickies I got you, James; then you'll

only have to change your trousers, and put on your velvet coat, and

there you'll be. Val likes you to look nice."

"Dicky!" said James. "You're always wasting your money on something."

But he suffered the change to be made till his neck also shone,

murmuring vaguely:

"He's an extravagant chap, I'm afraid."

A little brighter in the eye, with rather more colour than usual in his

cheeks, he took his seat in the drawing-room to wait for the sound of

the front-door bell.

"I've made it a proper dinner party," Emily said comfortably; "I thought

it would be good practice for Imogen--she must get used to it now she's

coming out."

James uttered an indeterminate sound, thinking of Imogen as she used to

climb about his knee or pull Christmas crackers with him.

"She'll be pretty," he muttered, "I shouldn't wonder."

"She is pretty," said Emily; "she ought to make a good match."

"There you go," murmured James; "she'd much better stay at home and look

after her mother." A second Dartie carrying off his pretty granddaughter

would finish him! He had never quite forgiven Emily for having been as

much taken in by Montague Dartie as he himself had been.

"Where's Warmson?" he said suddenly. "I should like a glass of Madeira

to-night."

"There's champagne, James."

James shook his head. "No body," he said; "I can't get any good out of

it."

Emily reached forward on her side of the fire and rang the bell.

"Your master would like a bottle of Madeira opened, Warmson."

"No, no!" said James, the tips of his ears quivering with vehemence, and

his eyes fixed on an object seen by him alone. "Look here, Warmson, you

go to the inner cellar, and on the middle shelf of the end bin on the

left you'll see seven bottles; take the one in the centre, and don't

shake it. It's the last of the Madeira I had from Mr. Jolyon when we

came in here--never been moved; it ought to be in prime condition still;

but I don't know, I can't tell."

"Very good, sir," responded the withdrawing Warmson.

"I was keeping it for our golden wedding," said James suddenly, "but I

shan't live three years at my age."

"Nonsense, James," said Emily, "don't talk like that."

"I ought to have got it up myself," murmured James, "he'll shake it as

likely as not." And he sank into silent recollection of long moments

among the open gas-jets, the cobwebs and the good smell of wine-soaked

corks, which had been appetiser to so many feasts. In the wine from that

cellar was written the history of the forty odd years since he had come

to the Park Lane house with his young bride, and of the many generations

of friends and acquaintances who had passed into the unknown; its

depleted bins preserved the record of family festivity--all the

marriages, births, deaths of his kith and kin. And when he was gone

there it would be, and he didn't know what would become of it. It'd be

drunk or spoiled, he shouldn't wonder!

From that deep reverie the entrance of his son dragged him, followed

very soon by that of Winifred and her two eldest.

They went down arm-in-arm--James with Imogen, the debutante, because

his pretty grandchild cheered him; Soames with Winifred; Emily with Val,

whose eyes lighting on the oysters brightened. This was to be a proper

full 'blowout' with 'fizz' and port! And he felt in need of it, after

what he had done that day, as yet undivulged. After the first glass or

two it became pleasant to have this bombshell up his sleeve, this piece

of sensational patriotism, or example, rather, of personal daring, to

display--for his pleasure in what he had done for his Queen and Country

was so far entirely personal. He was now a 'blood,' indissolubly

connected with guns and horses; he had a right to swagger--not, of

course, that he was going to. He should just announce it quietly, when

there was a pause. And, glancing down the menu, he determined on 'Bombe

aux fraises' as the proper moment; there would be a certain solemnity

while they were eating that. Once or twice before they reached that rosy

summit of the dinner he was attacked by remembrance that his grandfather

was never told anything! Still, the old boy was drinking Madeira, and

looking jolly fit! Besides, he ought to be pleased at this set-off to

the disgrace of the divorce. The sight of his uncle opposite, too, was

a sharp incentive. He was so far from being a sportsman that it would be

worth a lot to see his face. Besides, better to tell his mother in this

way than privately, which might upset them both! He was sorry for her,

but after all one couldn't be expected to feel much for others when one

had to part from Holly.

His grandfather's voice travelled to him thinly. "Val, try a little of

the Madeira with your ice. You won't get that up at college."

Val watched the slow liquid filling his glass, the essential oil of the

old wine glazing the surface; inhaled its aroma, and thought: 'Now for

it!' It was a rich moment. He sipped, and a gentle glow spread in his

veins, already heated. With a rapid look round, he said, "I joined

the Imperial Yeomanry to-day, Granny," and emptied his glass as though

drinking the health of his own act.

"What!" It was his mother's desolate little word.

"Young Jolly Forsyte and I went down there together."

"You didn't sign?" from Uncle Soames.

"Rather! We go into camp on Monday."

"I say!" cried Imogen.

All looked at James. He was leaning forward with his hand behind his

ear.

"What's that?" he said. "What's he saying? I can't hear."

Emily reached forward to pat Val's hand.

"It's only that Val has joined the Yeomanry, James; it's very nice for

him. He'll look his best in uniform."

"Joined the--rubbish!" came from James, tremulously loud. "You can't see

two yards before your nose. He--he'll have to go out there. Why! he'll

be fighting before he knows where he is."

Val saw Imogen's eyes admiring him, and his mother still and fashionable

with her handkerchief before her lips.

Suddenly his uncle spoke.

"You're under age."

"I thought of that," smiled Val; "I gave my age as twenty-one."

He heard his grandmother's admiring, "Well, Val, that was plucky of

you;" was conscious of Warmson deferentially filling his champagne

glass; and of his grandfather's voice moaning: "I don't know what'll

become of you if you go on like this."

Imogen was patting his shoulder, his uncle looking at him sidelong; only

his mother sat unmoving, till, affected by her stillness, Val said:

"It's all right, you know; we shall soon have them on the run. I only

hope I shall come in for something."

He felt elated, sorry, tremendously important all at once. This would

show Uncle Soames, and all the Forsytes, how to be sportsmen. He had

certainly done something heroic and exceptional in giving his age as

twenty-one.

Emily's voice brought him back to earth.

"You mustn't have a second glass, James. Warmson!"

"Won't they be astonished at Timothy's!" burst out Imogen. "I'd give

anything to see their faces. Do you have a sword, Val, or only a

popgun?"

"What made you?"

His uncle's voice produced a slight chill in the pit of Val's stomach.

Made him? How answer that? He was grateful for his grandmother's

comfortable:

"Well, I think it's very plucky of Val. I'm sure he'll make a splendid

soldier; he's just the figure for it. We shall all be proud of him."

"What had young Jolly Forsyte to do with it? Why did you go together?"

pursued Soames, uncannily relentless. "I thought you weren't friendly

with him?"

"I'm not," mumbled Val, "but I wasn't going to be beaten by him." He

saw his uncle look at him quite differently, as if approving. His

grandfather was nodding too, his grandmother tossing her head. They all

approved of his not being beaten by that cousin of his. There must be

a reason! Val was dimly conscious of some disturbing point outside his

range of vision; as it might be, the unlocated centre of a cyclone. And,

staring at his uncle's face, he had a quite unaccountable vision of a

woman with dark eyes, gold hair, and a white neck, who smelt nice, and

had pretty silken clothes which he had liked feeling when he was quite

small. By Jove, yes! Aunt Irene! She used to kiss him, and he had bitten

her arm once, playfully, because he liked it--so soft. His grandfather

was speaking:

"What's his father doing?"

"He's away in Paris," Val said, staring at the very queer expression on

his uncle's face, like--like that of a snarling dog.

"Artists!" said James. The word coming from the very bottom of his soul,

broke up the dinner.

Opposite his mother in the cab going home, Val tasted the after-fruits

of heroism, like medlars over-ripe.

She only said, indeed, that he must go to his tailor's at once and have

his uniform properly made, and not just put up with what they gave him.

But he could feel that she was very much upset. It was on his lips to

console her with the spoken thought that he would be out of the way of

that beastly divorce, but the presence of Imogen, and the knowledge

that his mother would not be out of the way, restrained him. He felt

aggrieved that she did not seem more proud of him. When Imogen had gone

to bed, he risked the emotional.

"I'm awfully sorry to have to leave you, Mother."

"Well, I must make the best of it. We must try and get you a commission

as soon as we can; then you won't have to rough it so. Do you know any

drill, Val?"

"Not a scrap."

"I hope they won't worry you much. I must take you about to get the

things to-morrow. Good-night; kiss me."

With that kiss, soft and hot, between his eyes, and those words, 'I hope

they won't worry you much,' in his ears, he sat down to a cigarette,

before a dying fire. The heat was out of him--the glow of cutting a

dash. It was all a damned heart-aching bore. 'I'll be even with that

chap Jolly,' he thought, trailing up the stairs, past the room where his

mother was biting her pillow to smother a sense of desolation which was

trying to make her sob.

And soon only one of the diners at James' was awake--Soames, in his

bedroom above his father's.

So that fellow Jolyon was in Paris--what was he doing there? Hanging

round Irene! The last report from Polteed had hinted that there might

be something soon. Could it be this? That fellow, with his beard and his

cursed amused way of speaking--son of the old man who had given him the

nickname 'Man of Property,' and bought the fatal house from him. Soames

had ever resented having had to sell the house at Robin Hill; never

forgiven his uncle for having bought it, or his cousin for living in it.

Reckless of the cold, he threw his window up and gazed out across the

Park. Bleak and dark the January night; little sound of traffic; a frost

coming; bare trees; a star or two. 'I'll see Polteed to-morrow,' he

thought. 'By God! I'm mad, I think, to want her still. That fellow!

If...? Um! No!'

CHAPTER X--DEATH OF THE DOG BALTHASAR

Jolyon, who had crossed from Calais by night, arrived at Robin Hill on

Sunday morning. He had sent no word beforehand, so walked up from the

station, entering his domain by the coppice gate. Coming to the log

seat fashioned out of an old fallen trunk, he sat down, first laying his

overcoat on it.

'Lumbago!' he thought; 'that's what love ends in at my time of life!'

And suddenly Irene seemed very near, just as she had been that day of

rambling at Fontainebleau when they had sat on a log to eat their lunch.

Hauntingly near! Odour drawn out of fallen leaves by the pale-filtering

sunlight soaked his nostrils. 'I'm glad it isn't spring,' he thought.

With the scent of sap, and the song of birds, and the bursting of the

blossoms, it would have been unbearable! 'I hope I shall be over it by

then, old fool that I am!' and picking up his coat, he walked on into

the field. He passed the pond and mounted the hill slowly.

Near the top a hoarse barking greeted him. Up on the lawn above the

fernery he could see his old dog Balthasar. The animal, whose dim eyes

took his master for a stranger, was warning the world against him.

Jolyon gave his special whistle. Even at that distance of a hundred

yards and more he could see the dawning recognition in the obese

brown-white body. The old dog got off his haunches, and his tail,

close-curled over his back, began a feeble, excited fluttering; he came

waddling forward, gathered momentum, and disappeared over the edge

of the fernery. Jolyon expected to meet him at the wicket gate, but

Balthasar was not there, and, rather alarmed, he turned into the

fernery. On his fat side, looking up with eyes already glazing, the old

dog lay.

"What is it, my poor old man?" cried Jolyon. Balthasar's curled and

fluffy tail just moved; his filming eyes seemed saying: "I can't get up,

master, but I'm glad to see you."

Jolyon knelt down; his eyes, very dimmed, could hardly see the slowly

ceasing heave of the dog's side. He raised the head a little--very

heavy.

"What is it, dear man? Where are you hurt?" The tail fluttered once; the

eyes lost the look of life. Jolyon passed his hands all over the inert

warm bulk. There was nothing--the heart had simply failed in that obese

body from the emotion of his master's return. Jolyon could feel the

muzzle, where a few whitish bristles grew, cooling already against his

lips. He stayed for some minutes kneeling; with his hand beneath the

stiffening head. The body was very heavy when he bore it to the top of

the field; leaves had drifted there, and he strewed it with a covering

of them; there was no wind, and they would keep him from curious eyes

until the afternoon. 'I'll bury him myself,' he thought. Eighteen years

had gone since he first went into the St. John's Wood house with that

tiny puppy in his pocket. Strange that the old dog should die just now!

Was it an omen? He turned at the gate to look back at that russet mound,

then went slowly towards the house, very choky in the throat.

June was at home; she had come down hotfoot on hearing the news of

Jolly's enlistment. His patriotism had conquered her feeling for the

Boers. The atmosphere of his house was strange and pocketty when Jolyon

came in and told them of the dog Balthasar's death. The news had a

unifying effect. A link with the past had snapped--the dog Balthasar!

Two of them could remember nothing before his day; to June he

represented the last years of her grandfather; to Jolyon that life of

domestic stress and aesthetic struggle before he came again into the

kingdom of his father's love and wealth! And he was gone!

In the afternoon he and Jolly took picks and spades and went out to the

field. They chose a spot close to the russet mound, so that they need

not carry him far, and, carefully cutting off the surface turf, began to

dig. They dug in silence for ten minutes, and then rested.

"Well, old man," said Jolyon, "so you thought you ought?"

"Yes," answered Jolly; "I don't want to a bit, of course."

How exactly those words represented Jolyon's own state of mind

"I admire you for it, old boy. I don't believe I should have done it at

your age--too much of a Forsyte, I'm afraid. But I suppose the type gets

thinner with each generation. Your son, if you have one, may be a pure

altruist; who knows?"

"He won't be like me, then, Dad; I'm beastly selfish."

"No, my dear, that you clearly are not." Jolly shook his head, and they

dug again.

"Strange life a dog's," said Jolyon suddenly: "The only four-footer with

rudiments of altruism and a sense of God!"

Jolly looked at his father.

"Do you believe in God, Dad? I've never known."

At so searching a question from one to whom it was impossible to make

a light reply, Jolyon stood for a moment feeling his back tried by the

digging.

"What do you mean by God?" he said; "there are two irreconcilable ideas

of God. There's the Unknowable Creative Principle--one believes in That.

And there's the Sum of altruism in man--naturally one believes in That."

"I see. That leaves out Christ, doesn't it?"

Jolyon stared. Christ, the link between those two ideas! Out of the

mouth of babes! Here was orthodoxy scientifically explained at last!

The sublime poem of the Christ life was man's attempt to join those two

irreconcilable conceptions of God. And since the Sum of human altruism

was as much a part of the Unknowable Creative Principle as anything else

in Nature and the Universe, a worse link might have been chosen after

all! Funny--how one went through life without seeing it in that sort of

way!

"What do you think, old man?" he said.

Jolly frowned. "Of course, my first year we talked a good bit about

that sort of thing. But in the second year one gives it up; I don't know

why--it's awfully interesting."

Jolyon remembered that he also had talked a good deal about it his first

year at Cambridge, and given it up in his second.

"I suppose," said Jolly, "it's the second God, you mean, that old

Balthasar had a sense of."

"Yes, or he would never have burst his poor old heart because of

something outside himself."

"But wasn't that just selfish emotion, really?"

Jolyon shook his head. "No, dogs are not pure Forsytes, they love

something outside themselves."

Jolly smiled.

"Well, I think I'm one," he said. "You know, I only enlisted because I

dared Val Dartie to."

"But why?"

"We bar each other," said Jolly shortly.

"Ah!" muttered Jolyon. So the feud went on, unto the third

generation--this modern feud which had no overt expression?

'Shall I tell the boy about it?' he thought. But to what end--if he had

to stop short of his own part?

And Jolly thought: 'It's for Holly to let him know about that chap.

If she doesn't, it means she doesn't want him told, and I should be

sneaking. Anyway, I've stopped it. I'd better leave well alone!'

So they dug on in silence, till Jolyon said:

"Now, old man, I think it's big enough." And, resting on their spades,

they gazed down into the hole where a few leaves had drifted already on

a sunset wind.

"I can't bear this part of it," said Jolyon suddenly.

"Let me do it, Dad. He never cared much for me."

Jolyon shook his head.

"We'll lift him very gently, leaves and all. I'd rather not see him

again. I'll take his head. Now!"

With extreme care they raised the old dog's body, whose faded tan and

white showed here and there under the leaves stirred by the wind. They

laid it, heavy, cold, and unresponsive, in the grave, and Jolly spread

more leaves over it, while Jolyon, deeply afraid to show emotion before

his son, began quickly shovelling the earth on to that still shape.

There went the past! If only there were a joyful future to look forward

to! It was like stamping down earth on one's own life. They replaced the

turf carefully on the smooth little mound, and, grateful that they had

spared each other's feelings, returned to the house arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER XI--TIMOTHY STAYS THE ROT

On Forsyte 'Change news of the enlistment spread fast, together with

the report that June, not to be outdone, was going to become a Red Cross

nurse. These events were so extreme, so subversive of pure Forsyteism,

as to have a binding effect upon the family, and Timothy's was thronged

next Sunday afternoon by members trying to find out what they thought

about it all, and exchange with each other a sense of family credit.

Giles and Jesse Hayman would no longer defend the coast but go to South

Africa quite soon; Jolly and Val would be following in April; as to

June--well, you never knew what she would really do.

The retirement from Spion Kop and the absence of any good news from

the seat of war imparted an air of reality to all this, clinched in

startling fashion by Timothy. The youngest of the old Forsytes--scarcely

eighty, in fact popularly supposed to resemble their father, 'Superior

Dosset,' even in his best-known characteristic of drinking Sherry--had

been invisible for so many years that he was almost mythical. A long

generation had elapsed since the risks of a publisher's business had

worked on his nerves at the age of forty, so that he had got out with a

mere thirty-five thousand pounds in the world, and started to make

his living by careful investment. Putting by every year, at compound

interest, he had doubled his capital in forty years without having once

known what it was like to shake in his shoes over money matters. He was

now putting aside some two thousand a year, and, with the care he was

taking of himself, expected, so Aunt Hester said, to double his capital

again before he died. What he would do with it then, with his sisters

dead and himself dead, was often mockingly queried by free spirits such

as Francie, Euphemia, or young Nicholas' second, Christopher, whose

spirit was so free that he had actually said he was going on the stage.

All admitted, however, that this was best known to Timothy himself, and

possibly to Soames, who never divulged a secret.

Those few Forsytes who had seen him reported a man of thick and robust

appearance, not very tall, with a brown-red complexion, grey hair, and

little of the refinement of feature with which most of the Forsytes had

been endowed by 'Superior Dosset's' wife, a woman of some beauty and a

gentle temperament. It was known that he had taken surprising interest

in the war, sticking flags into a map ever since it began, and there was

uneasiness as to what would happen if the English were driven into the

sea, when it would be almost impossible for him to put the flags in the

right places. As to his knowledge of family movements or his views about

them, little was known, save that Aunt Hester was always declaring

that he was very upset. It was, then, in the nature of a portent when

Forsytes, arriving on the Sunday after the evacuation of Spion Kop,

became conscious, one after the other, of a presence seated in the only

really comfortable armchair, back to the light, concealing the lower

part of his face with a large hand, and were greeted by the awed voice

of Aunt Hester:

"Your Uncle Timothy, my dear."

Timothy's greeting to them all was somewhat identical; and rather, as it

were, passed over by him than expressed:

"How de do? How de do? 'Xcuse me gettin' up!"

Francie was present, and Eustace had come in his car; Winifred had

brought Imogen, breaking the ice of the restitution proceedings with the

warmth of family appreciation at Val's enlistment; and Marian Tweetyman

with the last news of Giles and Jesse. These with Aunt Juley and Hester,

young Nicholas, Euphemia, and--of all people!--George, who had come

with Eustace in the car, constituted an assembly worthy of the family's

palmiest days. There was not one chair vacant in the whole of the little

drawing-room, and anxiety was felt lest someone else should arrive.

The constraint caused by Timothy's presence having worn off a little,

conversation took a military turn. George asked Aunt Juley when she was

going out with the Red Cross, almost reducing her to a state of gaiety;

whereon he turned to Nicholas and said:

"Young Nick's a warrior bold, isn't he? When's he going to don the wild

khaki?"

Young Nicholas, smiling with a sort of sweet deprecation, intimated that

of course his mother was very anxious.

"The Dromios are off, I hear," said George, turning to Marian Tweetyman;

"we shall all be there soon. En avant, the Forsytes! Roll, bowl, or

pitch! Who's for a cooler?"

Aunt Juley gurgled, George was so droll! Should Hester get Timothy's

map? Then he could show them all where they were.

At a sound from Timothy, interpreted as assent, Aunt Hester left the

room.

George pursued his image of the Forsyte advance, addressing Timothy

as Field Marshal; and Imogen, whom he had noted at once for 'a pretty

filly,'--as Vivandiere; and holding his top hat between his knees, he

began to beat it with imaginary drumsticks. The reception accorded to

his fantasy was mixed. All laughed--George was licensed; but all felt

that the family was being 'rotted'; and this seemed to them unnatural,

now that it was going to give five of its members to the service of the

Queen. George might go too far; and there was relief when he got up,

offered his arm to Aunt Juley, marched up to Timothy, saluted him,

kissed his aunt with mock passion, said, "Oh! what a treat, dear papa!

Come on, Eustace!" and walked out, followed by the grave and fastidious

Eustace, who had never smiled.

Aunt Juley's bewildered, "Fancy not waiting for the map! You mustn't

mind him, Timothy. He's so droll!" broke the hush, and Timothy removed

the hand from his mouth.

"I don't know what things are comin' to," he was heard to say. "What's

all this about goin' out there? That's not the way to beat those Boers."

Francie alone had the hardihood to observe: "What is, then, Uncle

Timothy?"

"All this new-fangled volunteerin' and expense--lettin' money out of the

country."

Just then Aunt Hester brought in the map, handling it like a baby with

eruptions. With the assistance of Euphemia it was laid on the piano, a

small Colwood grand, last played on, it was believed, the summer before

Aunt Ann died, thirteen years ago. Timothy rose. He walked over to the

piano, and stood looking at his map while they all gathered round.

"There you are," he said; "that's the position up to date; and very poor

it is. H'm!"

"Yes," said Francie, greatly daring, "but how are you going to alter it,

Uncle Timothy, without more men?"

"Men!" said Timothy; "you don't want men--wastin' the country's money.

You want a Napoleon, he'd settle it in a month."

"But if you haven't got him, Uncle Timothy?"

"That's their business," replied Timothy. "What have we kept the Army up

for--to eat their heads off in time of peace! They ought to be ashamed

of themselves, comin' on the country to help them like this! Let every

man stick to his business, and we shall get on."

And looking round him, he added almost angrily:

"Volunteerin', indeed! Throwin' good money after bad! We must save!

Conserve energy that's the only way." And with a prolonged sound, not

quite a sniff and not quite a snort, he trod on Euphemia's toe, and went

out, leaving a sensation and a faint scent of barley-sugar behind him.

The effect of something said with conviction by one who has evidently

made a sacrifice to say it is ever considerable. And the eight Forsytes

left behind, all women except young Nicholas, were silent for a moment

round the map. Then Francie said:

"Really, I think he's right, you know. After all, what is the Army for?

They ought to have known. It's only encouraging them."

"My dear!" cried Aunt Juley, "but they've been so progressive. Think of

their giving up their scarlet. They were always so proud of it. And now

they all look like convicts. Hester and I were saying only yesterday we

were sure they must feel it very much. Fancy what the Iron Duke would

have said!"

"The new colour's very smart," said Winifred; "Val looks quite nice in

his."

Aunt Juley sighed.

"I do so wonder what Jolyon's boy is like. To think we've never seen

him! His father must be so proud of him."

"His father's in Paris," said Winifred.

Aunt Hester's shoulder was seen to mount suddenly, as if to ward off her

sister's next remark, for Juley's crumpled cheeks had gushed.

"We had dear little Mrs. MacAnder here yesterday, just back from Paris.

And whom d'you think she saw there in the street? You'll never guess."

"We shan't try, Auntie," said Euphemia.

"Irene! Imagine! After all this time; walking with a fair beard...."

"Auntie! you'll kill me! A fair beard...."

"I was going to say," said Aunt Juley severely, "a fair-bearded

gentleman. And not a day older; she was always so pretty," she added,

with a sort of lingering apology.

"Oh! tell us about her, Auntie," cried Imogen; "I can just remember her.

She's the skeleton in the family cupboard, isn't she? And they're such

fun."

Aunt Hester sat down. Really, Juley had done it now!

"She wasn't much of a skeleton as I remember her," murmured Euphemia,

"extremely well-covered."

"My dear!" said Aunt Juley, "what a peculiar way of putting it--not very

nice."

"No, but what was she like?" persisted Imogen.

"I'll tell you, my child," said Francie; "a kind of modern Venus, very

well-dressed."

Euphemia said sharply: "Venus was never dressed, and she had blue eyes

of melting sapphire."

At this juncture Nicholas took his leave.

"Mrs. Nick is awfully strict," said Francie with a laugh.

"She has six children," said Aunt Juley; "it's very proper she should be

careful."

"Was Uncle Soames awfully fond of her?" pursued the inexorable Imogen,

moving her dark luscious eyes from face to face.

Aunt Hester made a gesture of despair, just as Aunt Juley answered:

"Yes, your Uncle Soames was very much attached to her."

"I suppose she ran off with someone?"

"No, certainly not; that is--not precisely.'

"What did she do, then, Auntie?"

"Come along, Imogen," said Winifred, "we must be getting back."

But Aunt Juley interjected resolutely: "She--she didn't behave at all

well."

"Oh, bother!" cried Imogen; "that's as far as I ever get."

"Well, my dear," said Francie, "she had a love affair which ended with

the young man's death; and then she left your uncle. I always rather

liked her."

"She used to give me chocolates," murmured Imogen, "and smell nice."

"Of course!" remarked Euphemia.

"Not of course at all!" replied Francie, who used a particularly

expensive essence of gillyflower herself.

"I can't think what we are about," said Aunt Juley, raising her hands,

"talking of such things!"

"Was she divorced?" asked Imogen from the door.

"Certainly not," cried Aunt Juley; "that is--certainly not."

A sound was heard over by the far door. Timothy had re-entered the back

drawing-room. "I've come for my map," he said. "Who's been divorced?"

"No one, Uncle," replied Francie with perfect truth.

Timothy took his map off the piano.

"Don't let's have anything of that sort in the family," he said. "All

this enlistin's bad enough. The country's breakin' up; I don't know what

we're comin' to." He shook a thick finger at the room: "Too many women

nowadays, and they don't know what they want."

So saying, he grasped the map firmly with both hands, and went out as if

afraid of being answered.

The seven women whom he had addressed broke into a subdued murmur, out

of which emerged Francie's, "Really, the Forsytes!" and Aunt Juley's:

"He must have his feet in mustard and hot water to-night, Hester; will

you tell Jane? The blood has gone to his head again, I'm afraid...."

That evening, when she and Hester were sitting alone after dinner, she

dropped a stitch in her crochet, and looked up:

"Hester, I can't think where I've heard that dear Soames wants Irene to

come back to him again. Who was it told us that George had made a funny

drawing of him with the words, 'He won't be happy till he gets it'?"

"Eustace," answered Aunt Hester from behind The Times; "he had it in his

pocket, but he wouldn't show it us."

Aunt Juley was silent, ruminating. The clock ticked, The Times crackled,

the fire sent forth its rustling purr. Aunt Juley dropped another

stitch.

"Hester," she said, "I have had such a dreadful thought."

"Then don't tell me," said Aunt Hester quickly.

"Oh! but I must. You can't think how dreadful!" Her voice sank to a

whisper:

"Jolyon--Jolyon, they say, has a--has a fair beard, now."

CHAPTER XII--PROGRESS OF THE CHASE

Two days after the dinner at James', Mr. Polteed provided Soames with

food for thought.

"A gentleman," he said, consulting the key concealed in his left hand,

"47 as we say, has been paying marked attention to 17 during the last

month in Paris. But at present there seems to have been nothing very

conclusive. The meetings have all been in public places, without

concealment--restaurants, the Opera, the Comique, the Louvre, Luxembourg

Gardens, lounge of the hotel, and so forth. She has not yet been traced

to his rooms, nor vice versa. They went to Fontainebleau--but nothing

of value. In short, the situation is promising, but requires patience."

And, looking up suddenly, he added:

"One rather curious point--47 has the same name as--er--31!"

'The fellow knows I'm her husband,' thought Soames.

"Christian name--an odd one--Jolyon," continued Mr. Polteed. "We know

his address in Paris and his residence here. We don't wish, of course,

to be running a wrong hare."

"Go on with it, but be careful," said Soames doggedly.

Instinctive certainty that this detective fellow had fathomed his secret

made him all the more reticent.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Polteed, "I'll just see if there's anything fresh

in."

He returned with some letters. Relocking the door, he glanced at the

envelopes.

"Yes, here's a personal one from 19 to myself."

"Well?" said Soames.

"Um!" said Mr. Polteed, "she says: '47 left for England to-day.

Address on his baggage: Robin Hill. Parted from 17 in Louvre Gallery

at 3.30; nothing very striking. Thought it best to stay and continue

observation of 17. You will deal with 47 in England if you think

desirable, no doubt.'" And Mr. Polteed lifted an unprofessional glance

on Soames, as though he might be storing material for a book on human

nature after he had gone out of business. "Very intelligent woman, 19,

and a wonderful make-up. Not cheap, but earns her money well. There's

no suspicion of being shadowed so far. But after a time, as you know,

sensitive people are liable to get the feeling of it, without anything

definite to go on. I should rather advise letting-up on 17, and keeping

an eye on 47. We can't get at correspondence without great risk. I

hardly advise that at this stage. But you can tell your client that

it's looking up very well." And again his narrowed eyes gleamed at his

taciturn customer.

"No," said Soames suddenly, "I prefer that you should keep the watch

going discreetly in Paris, and not concern yourself with this end."

"Very well," replied Mr. Polteed, "we can do it."

"What--what is the manner between them?"

"I'll read you what she says," said Mr. Polteed, unlocking a bureau

drawer and taking out a file of papers; "she sums it up somewhere

confidentially. Yes, here it is! '17 very attractive--conclude

47, longer in the tooth' (slang for age, you know)--'distinctly

gone--waiting his time--17 perhaps holding off for terms, impossible to

say without knowing more. But inclined to think on the whole--doesn't

know her mind--likely to act on impulse some day. Both have style.'"

"What does that mean?" said Soames between close lips.

"Well," murmured Mr. Polteed with a smile, showing many white teeth,

"an expression we use. In other words, it's not likely to be a weekend

business--they'll come together seriously or not at all."

"H'm!" muttered Soames, "that's all, is it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Polteed, "but quite promising."

'Spider!' thought Soames. "Good-day!"

He walked into the Green Park that he might cross to Victoria Station

and take the Underground into the City. For so late in January it was

warm; sunlight, through the haze, sparkled on the frosty grass--an

illumined cobweb of a day.

Little spiders--and great spiders! And the greatest spinner of all, his

own tenacity, for ever wrapping its cocoon of threads round any clear

way out. What was that fellow hanging round Irene for? Was it really

as Polteed suggested? Or was Jolyon but taking compassion on her

loneliness, as he would call it--sentimental radical chap that he had

always been? If it were, indeed, as Polteed hinted! Soames stood still.

It could not be! The fellow was seven years older than himself, no

better looking! No richer! What attraction had he?

'Besides, he's come back,' he thought; 'that doesn't look---I'll go and

see him!' and, taking out a card, he wrote:

"If you can spare half an hour some afternoon this week, I shall be

at the Connoisseurs any day between 5.30 and 6, or I could come to the

Hotch Potch if you prefer it. I want to see you.--S. F."

He walked up St. James's Street and confided it to the porter at the

Hotch Potch.

"Give Mr. Jolyon Forsyte this as soon as he comes in," he said, and took

one of the new motor cabs into the City....

Jolyon received that card the same afternoon, and turned his face

towards the Connoisseurs. What did Soames want now? Had he got wind of

Paris? And stepping across St. James's Street, he determined to make

no secret of his visit. 'But it won't do,' he thought, 'to let him know

she's there, unless he knows already.' In this complicated state of mind

he was conducted to where Soames was drinking tea in a small bay-window.

"No tea, thanks," said Jolyon, "but I'll go on smoking if I may."

The curtains were not yet drawn, though the lamps outside were lighted;

the two cousins sat waiting on each other.

"You've been in Paris, I hear," said Soames at last.

"Yes; just back."

"Young Val told me; he and your boy are going off, then?" Jolyon nodded.

"You didn't happen to see Irene, I suppose. It appears she's abroad

somewhere."

Jolyon wreathed himself in smoke before he answered: "Yes, I saw her."

"How was she?"

"Very well."

There was another silence; then Soames roused himself in his chair.

"When I saw you last," he said, "I was in two minds. We talked, and you

expressed your opinion. I don't wish to reopen that discussion. I only

wanted to say this: My position with her is extremely difficult. I don't

want you to go using your influence against me. What happened is a very

long time ago. I'm going to ask her to let bygones be bygones."

"You have asked her, you know," murmured Jolyon.

"The idea was new to her then; it came as a shock. But the more she

thinks of it, the more she must see that it's the only way out for both

of us."

"That's not my impression of her state of mind," said Jolyon with

particular calm. "And, forgive my saying, you misconceive the matter if

you think reason comes into it at all."

He saw his cousin's pale face grow paler--he had used, without knowing

it, Irene's own words.

"Thanks," muttered Soames, "but I see things perhaps more plainly than

you think. I only want to be sure that you won't try to influence her

against me."

"I don't know what makes you think I have any influence," said Jolyon;

"but if I have I'm bound to use it in the direction of what I think is

her happiness. I am what they call a 'feminist,' I believe."

"Feminist!" repeated Soames, as if seeking to gain time. "Does that mean

that you're against me?"

"Bluntly," said Jolyon, "I'm against any woman living with any man whom

she definitely dislikes. It appears to me rotten."

"And I suppose each time you see her you put your opinions into her

mind."

"I am not likely to be seeing her."

"Not going back to Paris?"

"Not so far as I know," said Jolyon, conscious of the intent

watchfulness in Soames' face.

"Well, that's all I had to say. Anyone who comes between man and wife,

you know, incurs heavy responsibility."

Jolyon rose and made him a slight bow.

"Good-bye," he said, and, without offering to shake hands, moved away,

leaving Soames staring after him. 'We Forsytes,' thought Jolyon, hailing

a cab, 'are very civilised. With simpler folk that might have come to a

row. If it weren't for my boy going to the war....' The war! A gust of

his old doubt swept over him. A precious war! Domination of peoples or

of women! Attempts to master and possess those who did not want you! The

negation of gentle decency! Possession, vested rights; and anyone 'agin'

'em--outcast! 'Thank Heaven!' he thought, 'I always felt "agin" 'em,

anyway!' Yes! Even before his first disastrous marriage he could

remember fuming over the bludgeoning of Ireland, or the matrimonial

suits of women trying to be free of men they loathed. Parsons would have

it that freedom of soul and body were quite different things! Pernicious

doctrine! Body and soul could not thus be separated. Free will was

the strength of any tie, and not its weakness. 'I ought to have told

Soames,' he thought, 'that I think him comic. Ah! but he's tragic, too!'

Was there anything, indeed, more tragic in the world than a man enslaved

by his own possessive instinct, who couldn't see the sky for it, or even

enter fully into what another person felt! 'I must write and warn her,'

he thought; 'he's going to have another try.' And all the way home to

Robin Hill he rebelled at the strength of that duty to his son which

prevented him from posting back to Paris....

But Soames sat long in his chair, the prey of a no less gnawing ache--a

jealous ache, as if it had been revealed to him that this fellow held

precedence of himself, and had spun fresh threads of resistance to his

way out. 'Does that mean that you're against me?' he had got nothing out

of that disingenuous question. Feminist! Phrasey fellow! 'I mustn't rush

things,' he thought. 'I have some breathing space; he's not going back

to Paris, unless he was lying. I'll let the spring come!' Though how the

spring could serve him, save by adding to his ache, he could not tell.

And gazing down into the street, where figures were passing from pool

to pool of the light from the high lamps, he thought: 'Nothing seems any

good--nothing seems worth while. I'm loney--that's the trouble.'

He closed his eyes; and at once he seemed to see Irene, in a dark street

below a church--passing, turning her neck so that he caught the gleam of

her eyes and her white forehead under a little dark hat, which had gold

spangles on it and a veil hanging down behind. He opened his eyes--so

vividly he had seen her! A woman was passing below, but not she! Oh no,

there was nothing there!

CHAPTER XIII--'HERE WE ARE AGAIN!'

Imogen's frocks for her first season exercised the judgment of her

mother and the purse of her grandfather all through the month of March.

With Forsyte tenacity Winifred quested for perfection. It took her

mind off the slowly approaching rite which would give her a freedom

but doubtfully desired; took her mind, too, off her boy and his

fast approaching departure for a war from which the news remained

disquieting. Like bees busy on summer flowers, or bright gadflies

hovering and darting over spiky autumn blossoms, she and her 'little

daughter,' tall nearly as herself and with a bust measurement not far

inferior, hovered in the shops of Regent Street, the establishments of

Hanover Square and of Bond Street, lost in consideration and the feel of

fabrics. Dozens of young women of striking deportment and peculiar

gait paraded before Winifred and Imogen, draped in 'creations.' The

models--'Very new, modom; quite the latest thing--' which those two

reluctantly turned down, would have filled a museum; the models which

they were obliged to have nearly emptied James' bank. It was no good

doing things by halves, Winifred felt, in view of the need for making

this first and sole untarnished season a conspicuous success. Their

patience in trying the patience of those impersonal creatures who swam

about before them could alone have been displayed by such as were moved

by faith. It was for Winifred a long prostration before her dear goddess

Fashion, fervent as a Catholic might make before the Virgin; for Imogen

an experience by no means too unpleasant--she often looked so nice, and

flattery was implicit everywhere: in a word it was 'amusing.'

On the afternoon of the 20th of March, having, as it were, gutted

Skywards, they had sought refreshment over the way at Caramel and

Baker's, and, stored with chocolate frothed at the top with cream,

turned homewards through Berkeley Square of an evening touched with

spring. Opening the door--freshly painted a light olive-green; nothing

neglected that year to give Imogen a good send-off--Winifred passed

towards the silver basket to see if anyone had called, and suddenly her

nostrils twitched. What was that scent?

Imogen had taken up a novel sent from the library, and stood absorbed.

Rather sharply, because of the queer feeling in her breast, Winifred

said:

"Take that up, dear, and have a rest before dinner."

Imogen, still reading, passed up the stairs. Winifred heard the door

of her room slammed to, and drew a long savouring breath. Was it spring

tickling her senses--whipping up nostalgia for her 'clown,' against all

wisdom and outraged virtue? A male scent! A faint reek of cigars and

lavender-water not smelt since that early autumn night six months ago,

when she had called him 'the limit.' Whence came it, or was it ghost of

scent--sheer emanation from memory? She looked round her. Nothing--not

a thing, no tiniest disturbance of her hall, nor of the diningroom. A

little day-dream of a scent--illusory, saddening, silly! In the silver

basket were new cards, two with 'Mr. and Mrs. Polegate Thom,' and one

with 'Mr. Polegate Thom' thereon; she sniffed them, but they smelled

severe. 'I must be tired,' she thought, 'I'll go and lie down.' Upstairs

the drawing-room was darkened, waiting for some hand to give it

evening light; and she passed on up to her bedroom. This, too, was

half-curtained and dim, for it was six o'clock. Winifred threw off her

coat--that scent again!--then stood, as if shot, transfixed against the

bed-rail. Something dark had risen from the sofa in the far corner. A

word of horror--in her family--escaped her: "God!"

"It's I--Monty," said a voice.

Clutching the bed-rail, Winifred reached up and turned the switch of the

light hanging above her dressing-table. He appeared just on the rim

of the light's circumference, emblazoned from the absence of his

watch-chain down to boots neat and sooty brown, but--yes!--split at the

toecap. His chest and face were shadowy. Surely he was thin--or was it a

trick of the light? He advanced, lighted now from toe-cap to the top of

his dark head--surely a little grizzled! His complexion had darkened,

sallowed; his black moustache had lost boldness, become sardonic; there

were lines which she did not know about his face. There was no pin in

his tie. His suit--ah!--she knew that--but how unpressed, unglossy! She

stared again at the toe-cap of his boot. Something big and relentless

had been 'at him,' had turned and twisted, raked and scraped him. And

she stayed, not speaking, motionless, staring at that crack across the

toe.

"Well!" he said, "I got the order. I'm back."

Winifred's bosom began to heave. The nostalgia for her husband which had

rushed up with that scent was struggling with a deeper jealousy than any

she had felt yet. There he was--a dark, and as if harried, shadow of

his sleek and brazen self! What force had done this to him--squeezed him

like an orange to its dry rind! That woman!

"I'm back," he said again. "I've had a beastly time. By God! I came

steerage. I've got nothing but what I stand up in, and that bag."

"And who has the rest?" cried Winifred, suddenly alive. "How dared you

come? You knew it was just for divorce that you got that order to come

back. Don't touch me!"

They held each to the rail of the big bed where they had spent so many

years of nights together. Many times, yes--many times she had wanted him

back. But now that he had come she was filled with this cold and deadly

resentment. He put his hand up to his moustache; but did not frizz and

twist it in the old familiar way, he just pulled it downwards.

"Gad!" he said: "If you knew the time I've had!"

"I'm glad I don't!"

"Are the kids all right?"

Winifred nodded. "How did you get in?"

"With my key."

"Then the maids don't know. You can't stay here, Monty."

He uttered a little sardonic laugh.

"Where then?"

"Anywhere."

"Well, look at me! That--that damned...."

"If you mention her," cried Winifred, "I go straight out to Park Lane

and I don't come back."

Suddenly he did a simple thing, but so uncharacteristic that it moved

her. He shut his eyes. It was as if he had said: 'All right! I'm dead to

the world!'

"You can have a room for the night," she said; "your things are still

here. Only Imogen is at home."

He leaned back against the bed-rail. "Well, it's in your hands," and his

own made a writhing movement. "I've been through it. You needn't hit too

hard--it isn't worth while. I've been frightened; I've been frightened,

Freddie."

That old pet name, disused for years and years, sent a shiver through

Winifred.

'What am I to do with him?' she thought. 'What in God's name am I to do

with him?'

"Got a cigarette?"

She gave him one from a little box she kept up there for when

she couldn't sleep at night, and lighted it. With that action the

matter-of-fact side of her nature came to life again.

"Go and have a hot bath. I'll put some clothes out for you in the

dressing-room. We can talk later."

He nodded, and fixed his eyes on her--they looked half-dead, or was it

that the folds in the lids had become heavier?

'He's not the same,' she thought. He would never be quite the same

again! But what would he be?

"All right!" he said, and went towards the door. He even moved

differently, like a man who has lost illusion and doubts whether it is

worth while to move at all.

When he was gone, and she heard the water in the bath running, she put

out a complete set of garments on the bed in his dressing-room, then

went downstairs and fetched up the biscuit box and whisky. Putting on

her coat again, and listening a moment at the bathroom door, she went

down and out. In the street she hesitated. Past seven o'clock! Would

Soames be at his Club or at Park Lane? She turned towards the latter.

Back!

Soames had always feared it--she had sometimes hoped it.... Back! So

like him--clown that he was--with this: 'Here we are again!' to make

fools of them all--of the Law, of Soames, of herself!

Yet to have done with the Law, not to have that murky cloud hanging over

her and the children! What a relief! Ah! but how to accept his return?

That 'woman' had ravaged him, taken from him passion such as he had

never bestowed on herself, such as she had not thought him capable of.

There was the sting! That selfish, blatant 'clown' of hers, whom she

herself had never really stirred, had been swept and ungarnished by

another woman! Insulting! Too insulting! Not right, not decent to take

him back! And yet she had asked for him; the Law perhaps would make

her now! He was as much her husband as ever--she had put herself out of

court! And all he wanted, no doubt, was money--to keep him in cigars and

lavender-water! That scent! 'After all, I'm not old,' she thought, 'not

old yet!' But that woman who had reduced him to those words: 'I've been

through it. I've been frightened--frightened, Freddie!' She neared her

father's house, driven this way and that, while all the time the Forsyte

undertow was drawing her to deep conclusion that after all he was her

property, to be held against a robbing world. And so she came to James'.

"Mr. Soames? In his room? I'll go up; don't say I'm here."

Her brother was dressing. She found him before a mirror, tying a black

bow with an air of despising its ends.

"Hullo!" he said, contemplating her in the glass; "what's wrong?"

"Monty!" said Winifred stonily.

Soames spun round. "What!"

"Back!"

"Hoist," muttered Soames, "with our own petard. Why the deuce didn't you

let me try cruelty? I always knew it was too much risk this way."

"Oh! Don't talk about that! What shall I do?"

Soames answered, with a deep, deep sound.

"Well?" said Winifred impatiently.

"What has he to say for himself?"

"Nothing. One of his boots is split across the toe."

Soames stared at her.

"Ah!" he said, "of course! On his beam ends. So--it begins again!

This'll about finish father."

"Can't we keep it from him?"

"Impossible. He has an uncanny flair for anything that's worrying."

And he brooded, with fingers hooked into his blue silk braces. "There

ought to be some way in law," he muttered, "to make him safe."

"No," cried Winifred, "I won't be made a fool of again; I'd sooner put

up with him."

The two stared at each other. Their hearts were full of feeling, but

they could give it no expression--Forsytes that they were.

"Where did you leave him?"

"In the bath," and Winifred gave a little bitter laugh. "The only thing

he's brought back is lavender-water."

"Steady!" said Soames, "you're thoroughly upset. I'll go back with you."

"What's the use?"

"We ought to make terms with him."

"Terms! It'll always be the same. When he recovers--cards and betting,

drink and...!" She was silent, remembering the look on her husband's

face. The burnt child--the burnt child. Perhaps...!

"Recovers?" replied Soames: "Is he ill?"

"No; burnt out; that's all."

Soames took his waistcoat from a chair and put it on, he took his

coat and got into it, he scented his handkerchief with eau-de-Cologne,

threaded his watch-chain, and said: "We haven't any luck."

And in the midst of her own trouble Winifred was sorry for him, as if in

that little saying he had revealed deep trouble of his own.

"I'd like to see mother," she said.

"She'll be with father in their room. Come down quietly to the study.

I'll get her."

Winifred stole down to the little dark study, chiefly remarkable for a

Canaletto too doubtful to be placed elsewhere, and a fine collection of

Law Reports unopened for many years. Here she stood, with her back to

maroon-coloured curtains close-drawn, staring at the empty grate, till

her mother came in followed by Soames.

"Oh! my poor dear!" said Emily: "How miserable you look in here! This is

too bad of him, really!"

As a family they had so guarded themselves from the expression of all

unfashionable emotion that it was impossible to go up and give her

daughter a good hug. But there was comfort in her cushioned voice, and

her still dimpled shoulders under some rare black lace. Summoning pride

and the desire not to distress her mother, Winifred said in her most

off-hand voice:

"It's all right, Mother; no good fussing."

"I don't see," said Emily, looking at Soames, "why Winifred shouldn't

tell him that she'll prosecute him if he doesn't keep off the premises.

He took her pearls; and if he's not brought them back, that's quite

enough."

Winifred smiled. They would all plunge about with suggestions of

this and that, but she knew already what she would be doing, and

that was--nothing. The feeling that, after all, she had won a sort of

victory, retained her property, was every moment gaining ground in her.

No! if she wanted to punish him, she could do it at home without the

world knowing.

"Well," said Emily, "come into the dining-room comfortably--you must

stay and have dinner with us. Leave it to me to tell your father." And,

as Winifred moved towards the door, she turned out the light. Not till

then did they see the disaster in the corridor.

There, attracted by light from a room never lighted, James was standing

with his duncoloured camel-hair shawl folded about him, so that his arms

were not free and his silvered head looked cut off from his fashionably

trousered legs as if by an expanse of desert. He stood, inimitably

stork-like, with an expression as if he saw before him a frog too large

to swallow.

"What's all this?" he said. "Tell your father? You never tell me

anything."

The moment found Emily without reply. It was Winifred who went up to

him, and, laying one hand on each of his swathed, helpless arms, said:

"Monty's not gone bankrupt, Father. He's only come back."

They all three expected something serious to happen, and were glad she

had kept that grip of his arms, but they did not know the depth of root

in that shadowy old Forsyte. Something wry occurred about his shaven

mouth and chin, something scratchy between those long silvery whiskers.

Then he said with a sort of dignity: "He'll be the death of me. I knew

how it would be."

"You mustn't worry, Father," said Winifred calmly. "I mean to make him

behave."

"Ah!" said James. "Here, take this thing off, I'm hot." They unwound the

shawl. He turned, and walked firmly to the dining-room.

"I don't want any soup," he said to Warmson, and sat down in his chair.

They all sat down too, Winifred still in her hat, while Warmson laid

the fourth place. When he left the room, James said: "What's he brought

back?"

"Nothing, Father."

James concentrated his eyes on his own image in a tablespoon. "Divorce!"

he muttered; "rubbish! What was I about? I ought to have paid him an

allowance to stay out of England. Soames you go and propose it to him."

It seemed so right and simple a suggestion that even Winifred was

surprised when she said: "No, I'll keep him now he's back; he must just

behave--that's all."

They all looked at her. It had always been known that Winifred had

pluck.

"Out there!" said James elliptically, "who knows what cut-throats!

You look for his revolver! Don't go to bed without. You ought to have

Warmson to sleep in the house. I'll see him myself tomorrow."

They were touched by this declaration, and Emily said comfortably:

"That's right, James, we won't have any nonsense."

"Ah!" muttered James darkly, "I can't tell."

The advent of Warmson with fish diverted conversation.

When, directly after dinner, Winifred went over to kiss her father

good-night, he looked up with eyes so full of question and distress that

she put all the comfort she could into her voice.

"It's all right, Daddy, dear; don't worry. I shan't need anyone--he's

quite bland. I shall only be upset if you worry. Good-night, bless you!"

James repeated the words, "Bless you!" as if he did not quite know what

they meant, and his eyes followed her to the door.

She reached home before nine, and went straight upstairs.

Dartie was lying on the bed in his dressing-room, fully redressed in a

blue serge suit and pumps; his arms were crossed behind his head, and an

extinct cigarette drooped from his mouth.

Winifred remembered ridiculously the flowers in her window-boxes after

a blazing summer day; the way they lay, or rather stood--parched, yet

rested by the sun's retreat. It was as if a little dew had come already

on her burnt-up husband.

He said apathetically: "I suppose you've been to Park Lane. How's the

old man?"

Winifred could not help the bitter answer: "Not dead."

He winced, actually he winced.

"Understand, Monty," she said, "I will not have him worried. If you

aren't going to behave yourself, you may go back, you may go anywhere.

Have you had dinner?"

No.

"Would you like some?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Imogen offered me some. I didn't want any."

Imogen! In the plenitude of emotion Winifred had forgotten her.

"So you've seen her? What did she say?"

"She gave me a kiss."

With mortification Winifred saw his dark sardonic face relaxed. 'Yes!'

she thought, 'he cares for her, not for me a bit.'

Dartie's eyes were moving from side to side.

"Does she know about me?" he said.

It flashed through Winifred that here was the weapon she needed. He

minded their knowing!

"No. Val knows. The others don't; they only know you went away."

She heard him sigh with relief.

"But they shall know," she said firmly, "if you give me cause."

"All right!" he muttered, "hit me! I'm down!"

Winifred went up to the bed. "Look here, Monty! I don't want to hit you.

I don't want to hurt you. I shan't allude to anything. I'm not going

to worry. What's the use?" She was silent a moment. "I can't stand any

more, though, and I won't! You'd better know. You've made me suffer.

But I used to be fond of you. For the sake of that...." She met the

heavy-lidded gaze of his brown eyes with the downward stare of her

green-grey eyes; touched his hand suddenly, turned her back, and went

into her room.

She sat there a long time before her glass, fingering her rings,

thinking of this subdued dark man, almost a stranger to her, on the bed

in the other room; resolutely not 'worrying,' but gnawed by jealousy of

what he had been through, and now and again just visited by pity.

CHAPTER XIV--OUTLANDISH NIGHT

Soames doggedly let the spring come--no easy task for one conscious that

time was flying, his birds in the bush no nearer the hand, no issue from

the web anywhere visible. Mr. Polteed reported nothing, except that his

watch went on--costing a lot of money. Val and his cousin were gone to

the war, whence came news more favourable; Dartie was behaving himself

so far; James had retained his health; business prospered almost

terribly--there was nothing to worry Soames except that he was 'held

up,' could make no step in any direction.

He did not exactly avoid Soho, for he could not afford to let them think

that he had 'piped off,' as James would have put it--he might want

to 'pipe on' again at any minute. But he had to be so restrained and

cautious that he would often pass the door of the Restaurant Bretagne

without going in, and wander out of the purlieus of that region which

always gave him the feeling of having been possessively irregular.

He wandered thus one May night into Regent Street and the most amazing

crowd he had ever seen; a shrieking, whistling, dancing, jostling,

grotesque and formidably jovial crowd, with false noses and

mouth-organs, penny whistles and long feathers, every appanage of

idiocy, as it seemed to him. Mafeking! Of course, it had been relieved!

Good! But was that an excuse? Who were these people, what were they,

where had they come from into the West End? His face was tickled, his

ears whistled into. Girls cried: 'Keep your hair on, stucco!' A youth so

knocked off his top-hat that he recovered it with difficulty. Crackers

were exploding beneath his nose, between his feet. He was bewildered,

exasperated, offended. This stream of people came from every quarter, as

if impulse had unlocked flood-gates, let flow waters of whose existence

he had heard, perhaps, but believed in never. This, then, was the

populace, the innumerable living negation of gentility and Forsyteism.

This was--egad!--Democracy! It stank, yelled, was hideous! In the East

End, or even Soho, perhaps--but here in Regent Street, in Piccadilly!

What were the police about! In 1900, Soames, with his Forsyte thousands,

had never seen the cauldron with the lid off; and now looking into

it, could hardly believe his scorching eyes. The whole thing was

unspeakable! These people had no restraint, they seemed to think him

funny; such swarms of them, rude, coarse, laughing--and what laughter!

Nothing sacred to them! He shouldn't be surprised if they began to

break windows. In Pall Mall, past those august dwellings, to enter which

people paid sixty pounds, this shrieking, whistling, dancing dervish of

a crowd was swarming. From the Club windows his own kind were looking

out on them with regulated amusement. They didn't realise! Why, this was

serious--might come to anything! The crowd was cheerful, but some day

they would come in different mood! He remembered there had been a mob in

the late eighties, when he was at Brighton; they had smashed things and

made speeches. But more than dread, he felt a deep surprise. They were

hysterical--it wasn't English! And all about the relief of a little town

as big as--Watford, six thousand miles away. Restraint, reserve!

Those qualities to him more dear almost than life, those indispensable

attributes of property and culture, where were they? It wasn't English!

No, it wasn't English! So Soames brooded, threading his way on. It was

as if he had suddenly caught sight of someone cutting the covenant 'for

quiet possession' out of his legal documents; or of a monster lurking

and stalking out in the future, casting its shadow before. Their want

of stolidity, their want of reverence! It was like discovering that

nine-tenths of the people of England were foreigners. And if that were

so--then, anything might happen!

At Hyde Park Corner he ran into George Forsyte, very sunburnt from

racing, holding a false nose in his hand.

"Hallo, Soames!" he said, "have a nose!"

Soames responded with a pale smile.

"Got this from one of these sportsmen," went on George, who had

evidently been dining; "had to lay him out--for trying to bash my hat.

I say, one of these days we shall have to fight these chaps, they're

getting so damned cheeky--all radicals and socialists. They want our

goods. You tell Uncle James that, it'll make him sleep."

'In vino veritas,' thought Soames, but he only nodded, and passed on up

Hamilton Place. There was but a trickle of roysterers in Park Lane, not

very noisy. And looking up at the houses he thought: 'After all, we're

the backbone of the country. They won't upset us easily. Possession's

nine points of the law.'

But, as he closed the door of his father's house behind him, all that

queer outlandish nightmare in the streets passed out of his mind almost

as completely as if, having dreamed it, he had awakened in the warm

clean morning comfort of his spring-mattressed bed.

Walking into the centre of the great empty drawing-room, he stood still.

A wife! Somebody to talk things over with. One had a right! Damn it! One

had a right!

PART III

CHAPTER I--SOAMES IN PARIS

Soames had travelled little. Aged nineteen he had made the 'petty tour'

with his father, mother, and Winifred--Brussels, the Rhine, Switzerland,

and home by way of Paris. Aged twenty-seven, just when he began to take

interest in pictures, he had spent five hot weeks in Italy, looking into

the Renaissance--not so much in it as he had been led to expect--and a

fortnight in Paris on his way back, looking into himself, as became a

Forsyte surrounded by people so strongly self-centred and 'foreign'

as the French. His knowledge of their language being derived from his

public school, he did not understand them when they spoke. Silence he

had found better for all parties; one did not make a fool of oneself.

He had disliked the look of the men's clothes, the closed-in cabs, the

theatres which looked like bee-hives, the Galleries which smelled of

beeswax. He was too cautious and too shy to explore that side of Paris

supposed by Forsytes to constitute its attraction under the rose; and as

for a collector's bargain--not one to be had! As Nicholas might have put

it--they were a grasping lot. He had come back uneasy, saying Paris was

overrated.

When, therefore, in June of 1900 he went to Paris, it was but his third

attempt on the centre of civilisation. This time, however, the mountain

was going to Mahomet; for he felt by now more deeply civilised than

Paris, and perhaps he really was. Moreover, he had a definite objective.

This was no mere genuflexion to a shrine of taste and immorality, but

the prosecution of his own legitimate affairs. He went, indeed,

because things were getting past a joke. The watch went on and on,

and--nothing--nothing! Jolyon had never returned to Paris, and no one

else was 'suspect!' Busy with new and very confidential matters, Soames

was realising more than ever how essential reputation is to a solicitor.

But at night and in his leisure moments he was ravaged by the thought

that time was always flying and money flowing in, and his own future as

much 'in irons' as ever. Since Mafeking night he had become aware that

a 'young fool of a doctor' was hanging round Annette. Twice he had come

across him--a cheerful young fool, not more than thirty.

Nothing annoyed Soames so much as cheerfulness--an indecent, extravagant

sort of quality, which had no relation to facts. The mixture of his

desires and hopes was, in a word, becoming torture; and lately the

thought had come to him that perhaps Irene knew she was being shadowed:

It was this which finally decided him to go and see for himself; to go

and once more try to break down her repugnance, her refusal to make

her own and his path comparatively smooth once more. If he failed

again--well, he would see what she did with herself, anyway!

He went to an hotel in the Rue Caumartin, highly recommended to

Forsytes, where practically nobody spoke French. He had formed no plan.

He did not want to startle her; yet must contrive that she had no chance

to evade him by flight. And next morning he set out in bright weather.

Paris had an air of gaiety, a sparkle over its star-shape which almost

annoyed Soames. He stepped gravely, his nose lifted a little sideways

in real curiosity. He desired now to understand things French. Was not

Annette French? There was much to be got out of his visit, if he could

only get it. In this laudable mood and the Place de la Concorde he was

nearly run down three times. He came on the 'Cours la Reine,' where

Irene's hotel was situated, almost too suddenly, for he had not yet

fixed on his procedure. Crossing over to the river side, he noted the

building, white and cheerful-looking, with green sunblinds, seen through

a screen of plane-tree leaves. And, conscious that it would be far

better to meet her casually in some open place than to risk a call, he

sat down on a bench whence he could watch the entrance. It was not quite

eleven o'clock, and improbable that she had yet gone out. Some pigeons

were strutting and preening their feathers in the pools of sunlight

between the shadows of the plane-trees. A workman in a blue blouse

passed, and threw them crumbs from the paper which contained his dinner.

A 'bonne' coiffed with ribbon shepherded two little girls with pig-tails

and frilled drawers. A cab meandered by, whose cocher wore a blue coat

and a black-glazed hat. To Soames a kind of affectation seemed to

cling about it all, a sort of picturesqueness which was out of date. A

theatrical people, the French! He lit one of his rare cigarettes, with

a sense of injury that Fate should be casting his life into outlandish

waters. He shouldn't wonder if Irene quite enjoyed this foreign life;

she had never been properly English--even to look at! And he began

considering which of those windows could be hers under the green

sunblinds. How could he word what he had come to say so that it might

pierce the defence of her proud obstinacy? He threw the fag-end of his

cigarette at a pigeon, with the thought: 'I can't stay here for ever

twiddling my thumbs. Better give it up and call on her in the late

afternoon.' But he still sat on, heard twelve strike, and then

half-past. 'I'll wait till one,' he thought, 'while I'm about it.' But

just then he started up, and shrinkingly sat down again. A woman

had come out in a cream-coloured frock, and was moving away under a

fawn-coloured parasol. Irene herself! He waited till she was too far

away to recognise him, then set out after her. She was strolling

as though she had no particular objective; moving, if he remembered

rightly, toward the Bois de Boulogne. For half an hour at least he kept

his distance on the far side of the way till she had passed into the

Bois itself. Was she going to meet someone after all? Some confounded

Frenchman--one of those 'Bel Ami' chaps, perhaps, who had nothing to do

but hang about women--for he had read that book with difficulty and a

sort of disgusted fascination. He followed doggedly along a shady alley,

losing sight of her now and then when the path curved. And it came back

to him how, long ago, one night in Hyde Park he had slid and sneaked

from tree to tree, from seat to seat, hunting blindly, ridiculously, in

burning jealousy for her and young Bosinney. The path bent sharply, and,

hurrying, he came on her sitting in front of a small fountain--a little

green-bronze Niobe veiled in hair to her slender hips, gazing at the

pool she had wept: He came on her so suddenly that he was past before

he could turn and take off his hat. She did not start up. She had always

had great self-command--it was one of the things he most admired in her,

one of his greatest grievances against her, because he had never

been able to tell what she was thinking. Had she realised that he

was following? Her self-possession made him angry; and, disdaining to

explain his presence, he pointed to the mournful little Niobe, and said:

"That's rather a good thing."

He could see, then, that she was struggling to preserve her composure.

"I didn't want to startle you; is this one of your haunts?"

"Yes."

"A little lonely." As he spoke, a lady, strolling by, paused to look at

the fountain and passed on.

Irene's eyes followed her.

"No," she said, prodding the ground with her parasol, "never lonely. One

has always one's shadow."

Soames understood; and, looking at her hard, he exclaimed:

"Well, it's your own fault. You can be free of it at any moment. Irene,

come back to me, and be free."

Irene laughed.

"Don't!" cried Soames, stamping his foot; "it's inhuman. Listen! Is

there any condition I can make which will bring you back to me? If I

promise you a separate house--and just a visit now and then?"

Irene rose, something wild suddenly in her face and figure.

"None! None! None! You may hunt me to the grave. I will not come."

Outraged and on edge, Soames recoiled.

"Don't make a scene!" he said sharply. And they both stood motionless,

staring at the little Niobe, whose greenish flesh the sunlight was

burnishing.

"That's your last word, then," muttered Soames, clenching his hands;

"you condemn us both."

Irene bent her head. "I can't come back. Good-bye!"

A feeling of monstrous injustice flared up in Soames.

"Stop!" he said, "and listen to me a moment. You gave me a sacred

vow--you came to me without a penny. You had all I could give you. You

broke that vow without cause, you made me a by-word; you refused me a

child; you've left me in prison; you--you still move me so that I want

you--I want you. Well, what do you think of yourself?"

Irene turned, her face was deadly pale, her eyes burning dark.

"God made me as I am," she said; "wicked if you like--but not so wicked

that I'll give myself again to a man I hate."

The sunlight gleamed on her hair as she moved away, and seemed to lay a

caress all down her clinging cream-coloured frock.

Soames could neither speak nor move. That word 'hate'--so extreme, so

primitive--made all the Forsyte in him tremble. With a deep imprecation

he strode away from where she had vanished, and ran almost into the arms

of the lady sauntering back--the fool, the shadowing fool!

He was soon dripping with perspiration, in the depths of the Bois.

'Well,' he thought, 'I need have no consideration for her now; she has

not a grain of it for me. I'll show her this very day that she's my wife

still.'

But on the way home to his hotel, he was forced to the conclusion that

he did not know what he meant. One could not make scenes in public, and

short of scenes in public what was there he could do? He almost cursed

his own thin-skinnedness. She might deserve no consideration; but

he--alas! deserved some at his own hands. And sitting lunchless in the

hall of his hotel, with tourists passing every moment, Baedeker in hand,

he was visited by black dejection. In irons! His whole life, with every

natural instinct and every decent yearning gagged and fettered, and all

because Fate had driven him seventeen years ago to set his heart upon

this woman--so utterly, that even now he had no real heart to set on any

other! Cursed was the day he had met her, and his eyes for seeing in her

anything but the cruel Venus she was! And yet, still seeing her with the

sunlight on the clinging China crepe of her gown, he uttered a little

groan, so that a tourist who was passing, thought: 'Man in pain! Let's

see! what did I have for lunch?'

Later, in front of a cafe near the Opera, over a glass of cold tea with

lemon and a straw in it, he took the malicious resolution to go and dine

at her hotel. If she were there, he would speak to her; if she were not,

he would leave a note. He dressed carefully, and wrote as follows:

"Your idyll with that fellow Jolyon Forsyte is known to me at all

events. If you pursue it, understand that I will leave no stone unturned

to make things unbearable for him. 'S. F.'"

He sealed this note but did not address it, refusing to write the maiden

name which she had impudently resumed, or to put the word Forsyte on the

envelope lest she should tear it up unread. Then he went out, and

made his way through the glowing streets, abandoned to evening

pleasure-seekers. Entering her hotel, he took his seat in a far corner

of the dining-room whence he could see all entrances and exits. She

was not there. He ate little, quickly, watchfully. She did not come. He

lingered in the lounge over his coffee, drank two liqueurs of brandy.

But still she did not come. He went over to the keyboard and examined

the names. Number twelve, on the first floor! And he determined to

take the note up himself. He mounted red-carpeted stairs, past a little

salon; eight-ten-twelve! Should he knock, push the note under, or...?

He looked furtively round and turned the handle. The door opened, but

into a little space leading to another door; he knocked on that--no

answer. The door was locked. It fitted very closely to the floor; the

note would not go under. He thrust it back into his pocket, and stood

a moment listening. He felt somehow certain that she was not there.

And suddenly he came away, passing the little salon down the stairs. He

stopped at the bureau and said:

"Will you kindly see that Mrs. Heron has this note?"

"Madame Heron left to-day, Monsieur--suddenly, about three o'clock.

There was illness in her family."

Soames compressed his lips. "Oh!" he said; "do you know her address?"

"Non, Monsieur. England, I think."

Soames put the note back into his pocket and went out. He hailed an open

horse-cab which was passing.

"Drive me anywhere!"

The man, who, obviously, did not understand, smiled, and waved his whip.

And Soames was borne along in that little yellow-wheeled Victoria all

over star-shaped Paris, with here and there a pause, and the question,

"C'est par ici, Monsieur?" "No, go on," till the man gave it up in

despair, and the yellow-wheeled chariot continued to roll between the

tall, flat-fronted shuttered houses and plane-tree avenues--a little

Flying Dutchman of a cab.

'Like my life,' thought Soames, 'without object, on and on!'

CHAPTER II--IN THE WEB

Soames returned to England the following day, and on the third morning

received a visit from Mr. Polteed, who wore a flower and carried a brown

billycock hat. Soames motioned him to a seat.

"The news from the war is not so bad, is it?" said Mr. Polteed. "I hope

I see you well, sir."

"Thanks! quite."

Mr. Polteed leaned forward, smiled, opened his hand, looked into it, and

said softly:

"I think we've done your business for you at last."

"What?" ejaculated Soames.

"Nineteen reports quite suddenly what I think we shall be justified in

calling conclusive evidence," and Mr. Polteed paused.

"Well?"

"On the 10th instant, after witnessing an interview between 17 and a

party, earlier in the day, 19 can swear to having seen him coming out of

her bedroom in the hotel about ten o'clock in the evening. With a little

care in the giving of the evidence that will be enough, especially as 17

has left Paris--no doubt with the party in question. In fact, they both

slipped off, and we haven't got on to them again, yet; but we shall--we

shall. She's worked hard under very difficult circumstances, and I'm

glad she's brought it off at last." Mr. Polteed took out a cigarette,

tapped its end against the table, looked at Soames, and put it back. The

expression on his client's face was not encouraging.

"Who is this new person?" said Soames abruptly.

"That we don't know. She'll swear to the fact, and she's got his

appearance pat."

Mr. Polteed took out a letter, and began reading:

"'Middle-aged, medium height, blue dittoes in afternoon, evening dress

at night, pale, dark hair, small dark moustache, flat cheeks, good chin,

grey eyes, small feet, guilty look....'"

Soames rose and went to the window. He stood there in sardonic fury.

Congenital idiot--spidery congenital idiot! Seven months at fifteen

pounds a week--to be tracked down as his own wife's lover! Guilty look!

He threw the window open.

"It's hot," he said, and came back to his seat.

Crossing his knees, he bent a supercilious glance on Mr. Polteed.

"I doubt if that's quite good enough," he said, drawling the words,

"with no name or address. I think you may let that lady have a rest, and

take up our friend 47 at this end." Whether Polteed had spotted him he

could not tell; but he had a mental vision of him in the midst of

his cronies dissolved in inextinguishable laughter. 'Guilty look!'

Damnation!

Mr. Polteed said in a tone of urgency, almost of pathos: "I assure you

we have put it through sometimes on less than that. It's Paris, you

know. Attractive woman living alone. Why not risk it, sir? We might

screw it up a peg."

Soames had sudden insight. The fellow's professional zeal was stirred:

'Greatest triumph of my career; got a man his divorce through a visit to

his own wife's bedroom! Something to talk of there, when I retire!' And

for one wild moment he thought: 'Why not?' After all, hundreds of men of

medium height had small feet and a guilty look!

"I'm not authorised to take any risk!" he said shortly.

Mr. Polteed looked up.

"Pity," he said, "quite a pity! That other affair seemed very costive."

Soames rose.

"Never mind that. Please watch 47, and take care not to find a mare's

nest. Good-morning!"

Mr. Polteed's eye glinted at the words 'mare's nest!'

"Very good. You shall be kept informed."

And Soames was alone again. The spidery, dirty, ridiculous business!

Laying his arms on the table, he leaned his forehead on them. Full ten

minutes he rested thus, till a managing clerk roused him with the draft

prospectus of a new issue of shares, very desirable, in Manifold and

Topping's. That afternoon he left work early and made his way to the

Restaurant Bretagne. Only Madame Lamotte was in. Would Monsieur have tea

with her?

Soames bowed.

When they were seated at right angles to each other in the little room,

he said abruptly:

"I want a talk with you, Madame."

The quick lift of her clear brown eyes told him that she had long

expected such words.

"I have to ask you something first: That young doctor--what's his name?

Is there anything between him and Annette?"

Her whole personality had become, as it were, like jet--clear-cut,

black, hard, shining.

"Annette is young," she said; "so is monsieur le docteur. Between young

people things move quickly; but Annette is a good daughter. Ah! what a

jewel of a nature!"

The least little smile twisted Soames' lips.

"Nothing definite, then?"

"But definite--no, indeed! The young man is veree nice, but--what would

you? There is no money at present."

She raised her willow-patterned tea-cup; Soames did the same. Their eyes

met.

"I am a married man," he said, "living apart from my wife for many

years. I am seeking to divorce her."

Madame Lamotte put down her cup. Indeed! What tragic things there were!

The entire absence of sentiment in her inspired a queer species of

contempt in Soames.

"I am a rich man," he added, fully conscious that the remark was not

in good taste. "It is useless to say more at present, but I think you

understand."

Madame's eyes, so open that the whites showed above them, looked at him

very straight.

"Ah! ca--mais nous avons le temps!" was all she said. "Another little

cup?" Soames refused, and, taking his leave, walked westward.

He had got that off his mind; she would not let Annette commit herself

with that cheerful young ass until...! But what chance of his ever

being able to say: 'I'm free.' What chance? The future had lost all

semblance of reality. He felt like a fly, entangled in cobweb filaments,

watching the desirable freedom of the air with pitiful eyes.

He was short of exercise, and wandered on to Kensington Gardens, and

down Queen's Gate towards Chelsea. Perhaps she had gone back to her

flat. That at all events he could find out. For since that last and most

ignominious repulse his wounded self-respect had taken refuge again in

the feeling that she must have a lover. He arrived before the little

Mansions at the dinner-hour. No need to enquire! A grey-haired lady was

watering the flower-boxes in her window. It was evidently let. And he

walked slowly past again, along the river--an evening of clear, quiet

beauty, all harmony and comfort, except within his heart.

CHAPTER III--RICHMOND PARK

On the afternoon that Soames crossed to France a cablegram was received

by Jolyon at Robin Hill:

"Your son down with enteric no immediate danger will cable again."

It reached a household already agitated by the imminent departure of

June, whose berth was booked for the following day. She was, indeed, in

the act of confiding Eric Cobbley and his family to her father's care

when the message arrived.

The resolution to become a Red Cross nurse, taken under stimulus of

Jolly's enlistment, had been loyally fulfilled with the irritation

and regret which all Forsytes feel at what curtails their individual

liberties. Enthusiastic at first about the 'wonderfulness' of the work,

she had begun after a month to feel that she could train herself so much

better than others could train her. And if Holly had not insisted on

following her example, and being trained too, she must inevitably have

'cried off.' The departure of Jolly and Val with their troop in April

had further stiffened her failing resolve. But now, on the point of

departure, the thought of leaving Eric Cobbley, with a wife and two

children, adrift in the cold waters of an unappreciative world weighed

on her so that she was still in danger of backing out. The reading of

that cablegram, with its disquieting reality, clinched the matter. She

saw herself already nursing Jolly--for of course they would let her

nurse her own brother! Jolyon--ever wide and doubtful--had no such hope.

Poor June!

Could any Forsyte of her generation grasp how rude and brutal life was?

Ever since he knew of his boy's arrival at Cape Town the thought of

him had been a kind of recurrent sickness in Jolyon. He could not get

reconciled to the feeling that Jolly was in danger all the time. The

cablegram, grave though it was, was almost a relief. He was now safe

from bullets, anyway. And yet--this enteric was a virulent disease! The

Times was full of deaths therefrom. Why could he not be lying out there

in that up-country hospital, and his boy safe at home? The un-Forsytean

self-sacrifice of his three children, indeed, had quite bewildered

Jolyon. He would eagerly change places with Jolly, because he loved his

boy; but no such personal motive was influencing them. He could only

think that it marked the decline of the Forsyte type.

Late that afternoon Holly came out to him under the old oak-tree. She

had grown up very much during these last months of hospital training

away from home. And, seeing her approach, he thought: 'She has more

sense than June, child though she is; more wisdom. Thank God she isn't

going out.' She had seated herself in the swing, very silent and still.

'She feels this,' thought Jolyon, 'as much as I' and, seeing her eyes

fixed on him, he said: "Don't take it to heart too much, my child. If he

weren't ill, he might be in much greater danger."

Holly got out of the swing.

"I want to tell you something, Dad. It was through me that Jolly

enlisted and went out."

"How's that?"

"When you were away in Paris, Val Dartie and I fell in love. We used to

ride in Richmond Park; we got engaged. Jolly found it out, and thought

he ought to stop it; so he dared Val to enlist. It was all my fault,

Dad; and I want to go out too. Because if anything happens to either of

them I should feel awful. Besides, I'm just as much trained as June."

Jolyon gazed at her in a stupefaction that was tinged with irony. So

this was the answer to the riddle he had been asking himself; and his

three children were Forsytes after all. Surely Holly might have told

him all this before! But he smothered the sarcastic sayings on his

lips. Tenderness to the young was perhaps the most sacred article of his

belief. He had got, no doubt, what he deserved. Engaged! So this was

why he had so lost touch with her! And to young Val Dartie--nephew of

Soames--in the other camp! It was all terribly distasteful. He closed

his easel, and set his drawing against the tree.

"Have you told June?"

"Yes; she says she'll get me into her cabin somehow. It's a single

cabin; but one of us could sleep on the floor. If you consent, she'll go

up now and get permission."

'Consent?' thought Jolyon. 'Rather late in the day to ask for that!' But

again he checked himself.

"You're too young, my dear; they won't let you."

"June knows some people that she helped to go to Cape Town. If they

won't let me nurse yet, I could stay with them and go on training there.

Let me go, Dad!"

Jolyon smiled because he could have cried.

"I never stop anyone from doing anything," he said.

Holly flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh! Dad, you are the best in the world."

'That means the worst,' thought Jolyon. If he had ever doubted his creed

of tolerance he did so then.

"I'm not friendly with Val's family," he said, "and I don't know Val,

but Jolly didn't like him."

Holly looked at the distance and said:

"I love him."

"That settles it," said Jolyon dryly, then catching the expression on

her face, he kissed her, with the thought: 'Is anything more pathetic

than the faith of the young?' Unless he actually forbade her going it

was obvious that he must make the best of it, so he went up to town with

June. Whether due to her persistence, or the fact that the official they

saw was an old school friend of Jolyon's, they obtained permission for

Holly to share the single cabin. He took them to Surbiton station the

following evening, and they duly slid away from him, provided with

money, invalid foods, and those letters of credit without which Forsytes

do not travel.

He drove back to Robin Hill under a brilliant sky to his late dinner,

served with an added care by servants trying to show him that they

sympathised, eaten with an added scrupulousness to show them that he

appreciated their sympathy. But it was a real relief to get to his cigar

on the terrace of flag-stones--cunningly chosen by young Bosinney for

shape and colour--with night closing in around him, so beautiful a

night, hardly whispering in the trees, and smelling so sweet that it

made him ache. The grass was drenched with dew, and he kept to those

flagstones, up and down, till presently it began to seem to him that he

was one of three, not wheeling, but turning right about at each end,

so that his father was always nearest to the house, and his son always

nearest to the terrace edge. Each had an arm lightly within his arm; he

dared not lift his hand to his cigar lest he should disturb them, and

it burned away, dripping ash on him, till it dropped from his lips,

at last, which were getting hot. They left him then, and his arms felt

chilly. Three Jolyons in one Jolyon they had walked.

He stood still, counting the sounds--a carriage passing on the highroad,

a distant train, the dog at Gage's farm, the whispering trees, the groom

playing on his penny whistle. A multitude of stars up there--bright and

silent, so far off! No moon as yet! Just enough light to show him the

dark flags and swords of the iris flowers along the terrace edge--his

favourite flower that had the night's own colour on its curving crumpled

petals. He turned round to the house. Big, unlighted, not a soul beside

himself to live in all that part of it. Stark loneliness! He could

not go on living here alone. And yet, so long as there was beauty, why

should a man feel lonely? The answer--as to some idiot's riddle--was:

Because he did. The greater the beauty, the greater the loneliness,

for at the back of beauty was harmony, and at the back of harmony

was--union. Beauty could not comfort if the soul were out of it. The

night, maddeningly lovely, with bloom of grapes on it in starshine, and

the breath of grass and honey coming from it, he could not enjoy, while

she who was to him the life of beauty, its embodiment and essence, was

cut off from him, utterly cut off now, he felt, by honourable decency.

He made a poor fist of sleeping, striving too hard after that

resignation which Forsytes find difficult to reach, bred to their own

way and left so comfortably off by their fathers. But after dawn he

dozed off, and soon was dreaming a strange dream.

He was on a stage with immensely high rich curtains--high as the very

stars--stretching in a semi-circle from footlights to footlights. He

himself was very small, a little black restless figure roaming up and

down; and the odd thing was that he was not altogether himself, but

Soames as well, so that he was not only experiencing but watching. This

figure of himself and Soames was trying to find a way out through the

curtains, which, heavy and dark, kept him in. Several times he had

crossed in front of them before he saw with delight a sudden narrow

rift--a tall chink of beauty the colour of iris flowers, like a glimpse

of Paradise, remote, ineffable. Stepping quickly forward to pass into

it, he found the curtains closing before him. Bitterly disappointed

he--or was it Soames?--moved on, and there was the chink again through

the parted curtains, which again closed too soon. This went on and on

and he never got through till he woke with the word "Irene" on his lips.

The dream disturbed him badly, especially that identification of himself

with Soames.

Next morning, finding it impossible to work, he spent hours riding

Jolly's horse in search of fatigue. And on the second day he made up his

mind to move to London and see if he could not get permission to follow

his daughters to South Africa. He had just begun to pack the following

morning when he received this letter:

"GREEN HOTEL,

"June 13.

"RICHMOND.

"MY DEAR JOLYON,

"You will be surprised to see how near I am to you. Paris became

impossible--and I have come here to be within reach of your advice. I

would so love to see you again. Since you left Paris I don't think I

have met anyone I could really talk to. Is all well with you and with

your boy? No one knows, I think, that I am here at present.

"Always your friend,

"IRENE."

Irene within three miles of him!--and again in flight! He stood with a

very queer smile on his lips. This was more than he had bargained for!

About noon he set out on foot across Richmond Park, and as he went

along, he thought: 'Richmond Park! By Jove, it suits us Forsytes!' Not

that Forsytes lived there--nobody lived there save royalty, rangers, and

the deer--but in Richmond Park Nature was allowed to go so far and no

further, putting up a brave show of being natural, seeming to say: 'Look

at my instincts--they are almost passions, very nearly out of hand, but

not quite, of course; the very hub of possession is to possess oneself.'

Yes! Richmond Park possessed itself, even on that bright day of June,

with arrowy cuckoos shifting the tree-points of their calls, and the

wood doves announcing high summer.

The Green Hotel, which Jolyon entered at one o'clock, stood nearly

opposite that more famous hostelry, the Crown and Sceptre; it was

modest, highly respectable, never out of cold beef, gooseberry tart, and

a dowager or two, so that a carriage and pair was almost always standing

before the door.

In a room draped in chintz so slippery as to forbid all emotion, Irene

was sitting on a piano stool covered with crewel work, playing

'Hansel and Gretel' out of an old score. Above her on a wall, not yet

Morris-papered, was a print of the Queen on a pony, amongst deer-hounds,

Scotch caps, and slain stags; beside her in a pot on the window-sill

was a white and rosy fuchsia. The Victorianism of the room almost

talked; and in her clinging frock Irene seemed to Jolyon like Venus

emerging from the shell of the past century.

"If the proprietor had eyes," he said, "he would show you the door; you

have broken through his decorations." Thus lightly he smothered up an

emotional moment. Having eaten cold beef, pickled walnut, gooseberry

tart, and drunk stone-bottle ginger-beer, they walked into the Park, and

light talk was succeeded by the silence Jolyon had dreaded.

"You haven't told me about Paris," he said at last.

"No. I've been shadowed for a long time; one gets used to that. But then

Soames came. By the little Niobe--the same story; would I go back to

him?"

"Incredible!"

She had spoken without raising her eyes, but she looked up now. Those

dark eyes clinging to his said as no words could have: 'I have come to

an end; if you want me, here I am.'

For sheer emotional intensity had he ever--old as he was--passed through

such a moment?

The words: 'Irene, I adore you!' almost escaped him. Then, with a

clearness of which he would not have believed mental vision capable, he

saw Jolly lying with a white face turned to a white wall.

"My boy is very ill out there," he said quietly.

Irene slipped her arm through his.

"Let's walk on; I understand."

No miserable explanation to attempt! She had understood! And they walked

on among the bracken, knee-high already, between the rabbit-holes and

the oak-trees, talking of Jolly. He left her two hours later at the

Richmond Hill Gate, and turned towards home.

'She knows of my feeling for her, then,' he thought. Of course! One

could not keep knowledge of that from such a woman!

CHAPTER IV--OVER THE RIVER

Jolly was tired to death of dreams. They had left him now too wan and

weak to dream again; left him to lie torpid, faintly remembering far-off

things; just able to turn his eyes and gaze through the window near his

cot at the trickle of river running by in the sands, at the straggling

milk-bush of the Karoo beyond. He knew what the Karoo was now, even if

he had not seen a Boer roll over like a rabbit, or heard the whine of

flying bullets. This pestilence had sneaked on him before he had smelled

powder. A thirsty day and a rash drink, or perhaps a tainted fruit--who

knew? Not he, who had not even strength left to grudge the evil thing

its victory--just enough to know that there were many lying here with

him, that he was sore with frenzied dreaming; just enough to watch

that thread of river and be able to remember faintly those far-away

things....

The sun was nearly down. It would be cooler soon. He would have liked

to know the time--to feel his old watch, so butter-smooth, to hear the

repeater strike. It would have been friendly, home-like. He had not even

strength to remember that the old watch was last wound the day he began

to lie here. The pulse of his brain beat so feebly that faces which came

and went, nurse's, doctor's, orderly's, were indistinguishable, just

one indifferent face; and the words spoken about him meant all the same

thing, and that almost nothing. Those things he used to do, though far

and faint, were more distinct--walking past the foot of the old steps

at Harrow 'bill'--'Here, sir! Here, sir!'--wrapping boots in the

Westminster Gazette, greenish paper, shining boots--grandfather coming

from somewhere dark--a smell of earth--the mushroom house! Robin Hill!

Burying poor old Balthasar in the leaves! Dad! Home....

Consciousness came again with noticing that the river had no water in

it--someone was speaking too. Want anything? No. What could one want?

Too weak to want--only to hear his watch strike....

Holly! She wouldn't bowl properly. Oh! Pitch them up! Not sneaks!...

'Back her, Two and Bow!' He was Two!... Consciousness came once more

with a sense of the violet dusk outside, and a rising blood-red

crescent moon. His eyes rested on it fascinated; in the long minutes of

brain-nothingness it went moving up and up....

"He's going, doctor!" Not pack boots again? Never? 'Mind your form,

Two!' Don't cry! Go quietly--over the river--sleep!... Dark? If somebody

would--strike--his--watch!...

CHAPTER V--SOAMES ACTS

A sealed letter in the handwriting of Mr. Polteed remained unopened

in Soames' pocket throughout two hours of sustained attention to the

affairs of the 'New Colliery Company,' which, declining almost from the

moment of old Jolyon's retirement from the Chairmanship, had lately run

down so fast that there was now nothing for it but a 'winding-up.' He

took the letter out to lunch at his City Club, sacred to him for the

meals he had eaten there with his father in the early seventies, when

James used to like him to come and see for himself the nature of his

future life.

Here in a remote corner before a plate of roast mutton and mashed

potato, he read:

"DEAR SIR,

"In accordance with your suggestion we have duly taken the matter up at

the other end with gratifying results. Observation of 47 has enabled us

to locate 17 at the Green Hotel, Richmond. The two have been observed

to meet daily during the past week in Richmond Park. Nothing absolutely

crucial has so far been notified. But in conjunction with what we had

from Paris at the beginning of the year, I am confident we could now

satisfy the Court. We shall, of course, continue to watch the matter

until we hear from you.

"Very faithfully yours,

"CLAUD POLTEED."

Soames read it through twice and beckoned to the waiter:

"Take this away; it's cold."

"Shall I bring you some more, sir?"

"No. Get me some coffee in the other room."

And, paying for what he had not eaten, he went out, passing two

acquaintances without sign of recognition.

'Satisfy the Court!' he thought, sitting at a little round marble

table with the coffee before him. That fellow Jolyon! He poured out his

coffee, sweetened and drank it. He would disgrace him in the eyes of his

own children! And rising, with that resolution hot within him, he found

for the first time the inconvenience of being his own solicitor. He

could not treat this scandalous matter in his own office. He must commit

the soul of his private dignity to a stranger, some other professional

dealer in family dishonour. Who was there he could go to? Linkman and

Laver in Budge Row, perhaps--reliable, not too conspicuous, only nodding

acquaintances. But before he saw them he must see Polteed again. But

at this thought Soames had a moment of sheer weakness. To part with his

secret? How find the words? How subject himself to contempt and secret

laughter? Yet, after all, the fellow knew already--oh yes, he knew! And,

feeling that he must finish with it now, he took a cab into the West

End.

In this hot weather the window of Mr. Polteed's room was positively

open, and the only precaution was a wire gauze, preventing the intrusion

of flies. Two or three had tried to come in, and been caught, so that

they seemed to be clinging there with the intention of being devoured

presently. Mr. Polteed, following the direction of his client's eye,

rose apologetically and closed the window.

'Posing ass!' thought Soames. Like all who fundamentally believe in

themselves he was rising to the occasion, and, with his little sideway

smile, he said: "I've had your letter. I'm going to act. I suppose

you know who the lady you've been watching really is?" Mr. Polteed's

expression at that moment was a masterpiece. It so clearly said: 'Well,

what do you think? But mere professional knowledge, I assure you--pray

forgive it!' He made a little half airy movement with his hand, as who

should say: 'Such things--such things will happen to us all!'

"Very well, then," said Soames, moistening his lips: "there's no need to

say more. I'm instructing Linkman and Laver of Budge Row to act for me.

I don't want to hear your evidence, but kindly make your report to them

at five o'clock, and continue to observe the utmost secrecy."

Mr. Polteed half closed his eyes, as if to comply at once. "My dear

sir," he said.

"Are you convinced," asked Soames with sudden energy, "that there is

enough?"

The faintest movement occurred to Mr. Polteed's shoulders.

"You can risk it," he murmured; "with what we have, and human nature,

you can risk it."

Soames rose. "You will ask for Mr. Linkman. Thanks; don't get up." He

could not bear Mr. Polteed to slide as usual between him and the door.

In the sunlight of Piccadilly he wiped his forehead. This had been the

worst of it--he could stand the strangers better. And he went back into

the City to do what still lay before him.

That evening in Park Lane, watching his father dine, he was overwhelmed

by his old longing for a son--a son, to watch him eat as he went down

the years, to be taken on his knee as James on a time had been wont to

take him; a son of his own begetting, who could understand him because

he was the same flesh and blood--understand, and comfort him, and become

more rich and cultured than himself because he would start even

better off. To get old--like that thin, grey wiry-frail figure sitting

there--and be quite alone with possessions heaping up around him; to

take no interest in anything because it had no future and must pass away

from him to hands and mouths and eyes for whom he cared no jot! No! He

would force it through now, and be free to marry, and have a son to care

for him before he grew to be like the old old man his father, wistfully

watching now his sweetbread, now his son.

In that mood he went up to bed. But, lying warm between those fine linen

sheets of Emily's providing, he was visited by memories and torture.

Visions of Irene, almost the solid feeling of her body, beset him. Why

had he ever been fool enough to see her again, and let this flood

back on him so that it was pain to think of her with that fellow--that

stealing fellow.

CHAPTER VI--A SUMMER DAY

His boy was seldom absent from Jolyon's mind in the days which followed

the first walk with Irene in Richmond Park. No further news had come;

enquiries at the War Office elicited nothing; nor could he expect to

hear from June and Holly for three weeks at least. In these days he felt

how insufficient were his memories of Jolly, and what an amateur of a

father he had been. There was not a single memory in which anger played

a part; not one reconciliation, because there had never been a rupture;

nor one heart-to-heart confidence, not even when Jolly's mother

died. Nothing but half-ironical affection. He had been too afraid of

committing himself in any direction, for fear of losing his liberty, or

interfering with that of his boy.

Only in Irene's presence had he relief, highly complicated by the

ever-growing perception of how divided he was between her and his son.

With Jolly was bound up all that sense of continuity and social creed of

which he had drunk deeply in his youth and again during his boy's public

school and varsity life--all that sense of not going back on what father

and son expected of each other. With Irene was bound up all his delight

in beauty and in Nature. And he seemed to know less and less which was

the stronger within him. From such sentimental paralysis he was rudely

awakened, however, one afternoon, just as he was starting off to

Richmond, by a young man with a bicycle and a face oddly familiar, who

came forward faintly smiling.

"Mr. Jolyon Forsyte? Thank you!" Placing an envelope in Jolyon's hand he

wheeled off the path and rode away. Bewildered, Jolyon opened it.

"Admiralty Probate and Divorce, Forsyte v. Forsyte and Forsyte!"

A sensation of shame and disgust was followed by the instant reaction

'Why, here's the very thing you want, and you don't like it!' But she

must have had one too; and he must go to her at once. He turned things

over as he went along. It was an ironical business. For, whatever the

Scriptures said about the heart, it took more than mere longings to

satisfy the law. They could perfectly well defend this suit, or at least

in good faith try to. But the idea of doing so revolted Jolyon. If not

her lover in deed he was in desire, and he knew that she was ready

to come to him. Her face had told him so. Not that he exaggerated her

feeling for him. She had had her grand passion, and he could not expect

another from her at his age. But she had trust in him, affection for

him, and must feel that he would be a refuge. Surely she would not ask

him to defend the suit, knowing that he adored her! Thank Heaven she had

not that maddening British conscientiousness which refused happiness

for the sake of refusing! She must rejoice at this chance of being free

after seventeen years of death in life! As to publicity, the fat was in

the fire! To defend the suit would not take away the slur. Jolyon had

all the proper feeling of a Forsyte whose privacy is threatened: If he

was to be hung by the Law, by all means let it be for a sheep! Moreover

the notion of standing in a witness box and swearing to the truth that

no gesture, not even a word of love had passed between them seemed

to him more degrading than to take the tacit stigma of being an

adulterer--more truly degrading, considering the feeling in his heart,

and just as bad and painful for his children. The thought of explaining

away, if he could, before a judge and twelve average Englishmen, their

meetings in Paris, and the walks in Richmond Park, horrified him. The

brutality and hypocritical censoriousness of the whole process; the

probability that they would not be believed--the mere vision of her,

whom he looked on as the embodiment of Nature and of Beauty, standing

there before all those suspicious, gloating eyes was hideous to him.

No, no! To defend a suit only made a London holiday, and sold the

newspapers. A thousand times better accept what Soames and the gods had

sent!

'Besides,' he thought honestly, 'who knows whether, even for my boy's

sake, I could have stood this state of things much longer? Anyway, her

neck will be out of chancery at last!' Thus absorbed, he was hardly

conscious of the heavy heat. The sky had become overcast, purplish with

little streaks of white. A heavy heat-drop plashed a little star pattern

in the dust of the road as he entered the Park. 'Phew!' he thought,

'thunder! I hope she's not come to meet me; there's a ducking up there!'

But at that very minute he saw Irene coming towards the Gate. 'We must

scuttle back to Robin Hill,' he thought.

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The storm had passed over the Poultry at four o'clock, bringing welcome

distraction to the clerks in every office. Soames was drinking a cup of

tea when a note was brought in to him:

"DEAR SIR,

"Forsyte v. Forsyte and Forsyte

"In accordance with your instructions, we beg to inform you that we

personally served the respondent and co-respondent in this suit to-day,

at Richmond, and Robin Hill, respectively.

"Faithfully yours,

"LINKMAN AND LAVER."

For some minutes Soames stared at that note. Ever since he had given

those instructions he had been tempted to annul them. It was so

scandalous, such a general disgrace! The evidence, too, what he had

heard of it, had never seemed to him conclusive; somehow, he believed

less and less that those two had gone all lengths. But this, of course,

would drive them to it; and he suffered from the thought. That fellow to

have her love, where he had failed! Was it too late? Now that they had

been brought up sharp by service of this petition, had he not a lever

with which he could force them apart? 'But if I don't act at once,' he

thought, 'it will be too late, now they've had this thing. I'll go and

see him; I'll go down!'

And, sick with nervous anxiety, he sent out for one of the 'new-fangled'

motor-cabs. It might take a long time to run that fellow to ground, and

Goodness knew what decision they might come to after such a shock! 'If

I were a theatrical ass,' he thought, 'I suppose I should be taking a

horse-whip or a pistol or something!' He took instead a bundle of papers

in the case of 'Magentie versus Wake,' intending to read them on the way

down. He did not even open them, but sat quite still, jolted and jarred,

unconscious of the draught down the back of his neck, or the smell of

petrol. He must be guided by the fellow's attitude; the great thing was

to keep his head!

London had already begun to disgorge its workers as he neared Putney

Bridge; the ant-heap was on the move outwards. What a lot of ants, all

with a living to get, holding on by their eyelids in the great scramble!

Perhaps for the first time in his life Soames thought: 'I could let go

if I liked! Nothing could touch me; I could snap my fingers, live as I

wished--enjoy myself!' No! One could not live as he had and just drop

it all--settle down in Capua, to spend the money and reputation he had

made. A man's life was what he possessed and sought to possess. Only

fools thought otherwise--fools, and socialists, and libertines!

The cab was passing villas now, going a great pace. 'Fifteen miles an

hour, I should think!' he mused; 'this'll take people out of town to

live!' and he thought of its bearing on the portions of London owned by

his father--he himself had never taken to that form of investment, the

gambler in him having all the outlet needed in his pictures. And the cab

sped on, down the hill past Wimbledon Common. This interview! Surely a

man of fifty-two with grown-up children, and hung on the line, would not

be reckless. 'He won't want to disgrace the family,' he thought; 'he

was as fond of his father as I am of mine, and they were brothers. That

woman brings destruction--what is it in her? I've never known.' The

cab branched off, along the side of a wood, and he heard a late cuckoo

calling, almost the first he had heard that year. He was now almost

opposite the site he had originally chosen for his house, and which

had been so unceremoniously rejected by Bosinney in favour of his own

choice. He began passing his handkerchief over his face and hands,

taking deep breaths to give him steadiness. 'Keep one's head,' he

thought, 'keep one's head!'

The cab turned in at the drive which might have been his own, and the

sound of music met him. He had forgotten the fellow's daughters.

"I may be out again directly," he said to the driver, "or I may be kept

some time"; and he rang the bell.

Following the maid through the curtains into the inner hall, he felt

relieved that the impact of this meeting would be broken by June or

Holly, whichever was playing in there, so that with complete surprise

he saw Irene at the piano, and Jolyon sitting in an armchair listening.

They both stood up. Blood surged into Soames' brain, and all his

resolution to be guided by this or that left him utterly. The look of

his farmer forbears--dogged Forsytes down by the sea, from 'Superior

Dosset' back--grinned out of his face.

"Very pretty!" he said.

He heard the fellow murmur:

"This is hardly the place--we'll go to the study, if you don't mind."

And they both passed him through the curtain opening. In the little

room to which he followed them, Irene stood by the open window, and the

'fellow' close to her by a big chair. Soames pulled the door to behind

him with a slam; the sound carried him back all those years to the day

when he had shut out Jolyon--shut him out for meddling with his affairs.

"Well," he said, "what have you to say for yourselves?"

The fellow had the effrontery to smile.

"What we have received to-day has taken away your right to ask. I should

imagine you will be glad to have your neck out of chancery."

"Oh!" said Soames; "you think so! I came to tell you that I'll divorce

her with every circumstance of disgrace to you both, unless you swear to

keep clear of each other from now on."

He was astonished at his fluency, because his mind was stammering and

his hands twitching. Neither of them answered; but their faces seemed to

him as if contemptuous.

"Well," he said; "you--Irene?"

Her lips moved, but Jolyon laid his hand on her arm.

"Let her alone!" said Soames furiously. "Irene, will you swear it?"

"No."

"Oh! and you?"

"Still less."

"So then you're guilty, are you?"

"Yes, guilty." It was Irene speaking in that serene voice, with that

unreached air which had maddened him so often; and, carried beyond

himself, he cried:

"You are a devil"

"Go out! Leave this house, or I'll do you an injury."

That fellow to talk of injuries! Did he know how near his throat was to

being scragged?

"A trustee," he said, "embezzling trust property! A thief, stealing his

cousin's wife."

"Call me what you like. You have chosen your part, we have chosen ours.

Go out!"

If he had brought a weapon Soames might have used it at that moment.

"I'll make you pay!" he said.

"I shall be very happy."

At that deadly turning of the meaning of his speech by the son of him

who had nicknamed him 'the man of property,' Soames stood glaring. It

was ridiculous!

There they were, kept from violence by some secret force. No blow

possible, no words to meet the case. But he could not, did not know how

to turn and go away. His eyes fastened on Irene's face--the last time he

would ever see that fatal face--the last time, no doubt!

"You," he said suddenly, "I hope you'll treat him as you treated

me--that's all."

He saw her wince, and with a sensation not quite triumph, not quite

relief, he wrenched open the door, passed out through the hall, and got

into his cab. He lolled against the cushion with his eyes shut. Never in

his life had he been so near to murderous violence, never so thrown away

the restraint which was his second nature. He had a stripped and

naked feeling, as if all virtue had gone out of him--life meaningless,

mind-striking work. Sunlight streamed in on him, but he felt cold. The

scene he had passed through had gone from him already, what was before

him would not materialise, he could catch on to nothing; and he felt

frightened, as if he had been hanging over the edge of a precipice, as

if with another turn of the screw sanity would have failed him. 'I'm not

fit for it,' he thought; 'I mustn't--I'm not fit for it.' The cab sped

on, and in mechanical procession trees, houses, people passed, but had

no significance. 'I feel very queer,' he thought; 'I'll take a Turkish

bath.--I've been very near to something. It won't do.' The cab whirred

its way back over the bridge, up the Fulham Road, along the Park.

"To the Hammam," said Soames.

Curious that on so warm a summer day, heat should be so comforting!

Crossing into the hot room he met George Forsyte coming out, red and

glistening.

"Hallo!" said George; "what are you training for? You've not got much

superfluous."

Buffoon! Soames passed him with his sideway smile. Lying back, rubbing

his skin uneasily for the first signs of perspiration, he thought: 'Let

them laugh! I won't feel anything! I can't stand violence! It's not good

for me!'

CHAPTER VII--A SUMMER NIGHT

Soames left dead silence in the little study. "Thank you for that good

lie," said Jolyon suddenly. "Come out--the air in here is not what it

was!"

In front of a long high southerly wall on which were trained peach-trees

the two walked up and down in silence. Old Jolyon had planted some

cupressus-trees, at intervals, between this grassy terrace and the

dipping meadow full of buttercups and ox-eyed daisies; for twelve years

they had flourished, till their dark spiral shapes had quite a look of

Italy. Birds fluttered softly in the wet shrubbery; the swallows swooped

past, with a steel-blue sheen on their swift little bodies; the grass

felt springy beneath the feet, its green refreshed; butterflies chased

each other. After that painful scene the quiet of Nature was wonderfully

poignant. Under the sun-soaked wall ran a narrow strip of garden-bed

full of mignonette and pansies, and from the bees came a low hum in

which all other sounds were set--the mooing of a cow deprived of her

calf, the calling of a cuckoo from an elm-tree at the bottom of the

meadow. Who would have thought that behind them, within ten miles,

London began--that London of the Forsytes, with its wealth, its misery;

its dirt and noise; its jumbled stone isles of beauty, its grey sea

of hideous brick and stucco? That London which had seen Irene's early

tragedy, and Jolyon's own hard days; that web; that princely workhouse

of the possessive instinct!

And while they walked Jolyon pondered those words: 'I hope you'll treat

him as you treated me.' That would depend on himself. Could he trust

himself? Did Nature permit a Forsyte not to make a slave of what he

adored? Could beauty be confided to him? Or should she not be just a

visitor, coming when she would, possessed for moments which passed, to

return only at her own choosing? 'We are a breed of spoilers!' thought

Jolyon, 'close and greedy; the bloom of life is not safe with us. Let

her come to me as she will, when she will, not at all if she will not.

Let me be just her stand-by, her perching-place; never-never her cage!'

She was the chink of beauty in his dream. Was he to pass through the

curtains now and reach her? Was the rich stuff of many possessions,

the close encircling fabric of the possessive instinct walling in that

little black figure of himself, and Soames--was it to be rent so that

he could pass through into his vision, find there something not of the

senses only? 'Let me,' he thought, 'ah! let me only know how not to

grasp and destroy!'

But at dinner there were plans to be made. To-night she would go back to

the hotel, but tomorrow he would take her up to London. He must instruct

his solicitor--Jack Herring. Not a finger must be raised to hinder the

process of the Law. Damages exemplary, judicial strictures, costs, what

they liked--let it go through at the first moment, so that her neck

might be out of chancery at last! To-morrow he would see Herring--they

would go and see him together. And then--abroad, leaving no doubt, no

difficulty about evidence, making the lie she had told into the truth.

He looked round at her; and it seemed to his adoring eyes that more

than a woman was sitting there. The spirit of universal beauty, deep,

mysterious, which the old painters, Titian, Giorgione, Botticelli, had

known how to capture and transfer to the faces of their women--this

flying beauty seemed to him imprinted on her brow, her hair, her lips,

and in her eyes.

'And this is to be mine!' he thought. 'It frightens me!'

After dinner they went out on to the terrace to have coffee. They sat

there long, the evening was so lovely, watching the summer night

come very slowly on. It was still warm and the air smelled of lime

blossom--early this summer. Two bats were flighting with the faint

mysterious little noise they make. He had placed the chairs in front

of the study window, and moths flew past to visit the discreet light in

there. There was no wind, and not a whisper in the old oak-tree twenty

yards away! The moon rose from behind the copse, nearly full; and the

two lights struggled, till moonlight conquered, changing the colour and

quality of all the garden, stealing along the flagstones, reaching their

feet, climbing up, changing their faces.

"Well," said Jolyon at last, "you'll be tired, dear; we'd better start.

The maid will show you Holly's room," and he rang the study bell. The

maid who came handed him a telegram. Watching her take Irene away, he

thought: 'This must have come an hour or more ago, and she didn't bring

it out to us! That shows! Well, we'll be hung for a sheep soon!' And,

opening the telegram, he read:

"JOLYON FORSYTE, Robin Hill.--Your son passed painlessly away on June

20th. Deep sympathy"--some name unknown to him.

He dropped it, spun round, stood motionless. The moon shone in on him;

a moth flew in his face. The first day of all that he had not thought

almost ceaselessly of Jolly. He went blindly towards the window, struck

against the old armchair--his father's--and sank down on to the arm of

it. He sat there huddled' forward, staring into the night. Gone out like

a candle flame; far from home, from love, all by himself, in the dark!

His boy! From a little chap always so good to him--so friendly! Twenty

years old, and cut down like grass--to have no life at all! 'I didn't

really know him,' he thought, 'and he didn't know me; but we loved each

other. It's only love that matters.'

To die out there--lonely--wanting them--wanting home! This seemed to his

Forsyte heart more painful, more pitiful than death itself. No shelter,

no protection, no love at the last! And all the deeply rooted clanship

in him, the family feeling and essential clinging to his own flesh and

blood which had been so strong in old Jolyon was so strong in all the

Forsytes--felt outraged, cut, and torn by his boy's lonely passing.

Better far if he had died in battle, without time to long for them to

come to him, to call out for them, perhaps, in his delirium!

The moon had passed behind the oak-tree now, endowing it with uncanny

life, so that it seemed watching him--the oak-tree his boy had been so

fond of climbing, out of which he had once fallen and hurt himself, and

hadn't cried!

The door creaked. He saw Irene come in, pick up the telegram and read

it. He heard the faint rustle of her dress. She sank on her knees close

to him, and he forced himself to smile at her. She stretched up her arms

and drew his head down on her shoulder. The perfume and warmth of her

encircled him; her presence gained slowly his whole being.

CHAPTER VIII--JAMES IN WAITING

Sweated to serenity, Soames dined at the Remove and turned his face

toward Park Lane. His father had been unwell lately. This would have to

be kept from him! Never till that moment had he realised how much the

dread of bringing James' grey hairs down with sorrow to the grave had

counted with him; how intimately it was bound up with his own shrinking

from scandal. His affection for his father, always deep, had increased

of late years with the knowledge that James looked on him as the real

prop of his decline. It seemed pitiful that one who had been so careful

all his life and done so much for the family name--so that it was almost

a byword for solid, wealthy respectability--should at his last gasp have

to see it in all the newspapers. This was like lending a hand to Death,

that final enemy of Forsytes. 'I must tell mother,' he thought, 'and

when it comes on, we must keep the papers from him somehow. He sees

hardly anyone.' Letting himself in with his latchkey, he was beginning

to ascend he stairs when he became conscious of commotion on the

second-floor landing. His mother's voice was saying:

"Now, James, you'll catch cold. Why can't you wait quietly?"

His father's answering

"Wait? I'm always waiting. Why doesn't he come in?"

"You can speak to him to-morrow morning, instead of making a guy of

yourself on the landing."

"He'll go up to bed, I shouldn't wonder. I shan't sleep."

"Now come back to bed, James."

"Um! I might die before to-morrow morning for all you can tell."

"You shan't have to wait till to-morrow morning; I'll go down and bring

him up. Don't fuss!"

"There you go--always so cock-a-hoop. He mayn't come in at all."

"Well, if he doesn't come in you won't catch him by standing out here in

your dressing-gown."

Soames rounded the last bend and came in sight of his father's

tall figure wrapped in a brown silk quilted gown, stooping over the

balustrade above. Light fell on his silvery hair and whiskers, investing

his head with, a sort of halo.

"Here he is!" he heard him say in a voice which sounded injured, and his

mother's comfortable answer from the bedroom door:

"That's all right. Come in, and I'll brush your hair." James extended a

thin, crooked finger, oddly like the beckoning of a skeleton, and passed

through the doorway of his bedroom.

'What is it?' thought Soames. 'What has he got hold of now?'

His father was sitting before the dressing-table sideways to the mirror,

while Emily slowly passed two silver-backed brushes through and through

his hair. She would do this several times a day, for it had on him

something of the effect produced on a cat by scratching between its

ears.

"There you are!" he said. "I've been waiting."

Soames stroked his shoulder, and, taking up a silver button-hook,

examined the mark on it.

"Well," he said, "you're looking better."

James shook his head.

"I want to say something. Your mother hasn't heard." He announced

Emily's ignorance of what he hadn't told her, as if it were a grievance.

"Your father's been in a great state all the evening. I'm sure I don't

know what about."

The faint 'whisk-whisk' of the brushes continued the soothing of her

voice.

"No! you know nothing," said James. "Soames can tell me." And, fixing

his grey eyes, in which there was a look of strain, uncomfortable to

watch, on his son, he muttered:

"I'm getting on, Soames. At my age I can't tell. I might die any time.

There'll be a lot of money. There's Rachel and Cicely got no children;

and Val's out there--that chap his father will get hold of all he can.

And somebody'll pick up Imogen, I shouldn't wonder."

Soames listened vaguely--he had heard all this before. Whish-whish! went

the brushes.

"If that's all!" said Emily.

"All!" cried James; "it's nothing. I'm coming to that." And again his

eyes strained pitifully at Soames.

"It's you, my boy," he said suddenly; "you ought to get a divorce."

That word, from those of all lips, was almost too much for Soames'

composure. His eyes reconcentrated themselves quickly on the buttonhook,

and as if in apology James hurried on:

"I don't know what's become of her--they say she's abroad. Your Uncle

Swithin used to admire her--he was a funny fellow." (So he always

alluded to his dead twin-'The Stout and the Lean of it,' they had been

called.) "She wouldn't be alone, I should say." And with that summing-up

of the effect of beauty on human nature, he was silent, watching his

son with eyes doubting as a bird's. Soames, too, was silent. Whish-whish

went the brushes.

"Come, James! Soames knows best. It's his 'business."

"Ah!" said James, and the word came from deep down; "but there's all

my money, and there's his--who's it to go to? And when he dies the name

goes out."

Soames replaced the button-hook on the lace and pink silk of the

dressing-table coverlet.

"The name?" said Emily, "there are all the other Forsytes."

"As if that helped me," muttered James. "I shall be in my grave, and

there'll be nobody, unless he marries again."

"You're quite right," said Soames quietly; "I'm getting a divorce."

James' eyes almost started from his head.

"What?" he cried. "There! nobody tells me anything."

"Well," said Emily, "who would have imagined you wanted it? My dear boy,

that is a surprise, after all these years."

"It'll be a scandal," muttered James, as if to himself; "but I can't

help that. Don't brush so hard. When'll it come on?"

"Before the Long Vacation; it's not defended."

James' lips moved in secret calculation. "I shan't live to see my

grandson," he muttered.

Emily ceased brushing. "Of course you will, James. Soames will be as

quick as he can."

There was a long silence, till James reached out his arm.

"Here! let's have the eau-de-Cologne," and, putting it to his nose, he

moved his forehead in the direction of his son. Soames bent over and

kissed that brow just where the hair began. A relaxing quiver passed

over James' face, as though the wheels of anxiety within were running

down.

"I'll get to bed," he said; "I shan't want to see the papers when that

comes. They're a morbid lot; I can't pay attention to them, I'm too

old."

Queerly affected, Soames went to the door; he heard his father say:

"Here, I'm tired. I'll say a prayer in bed."

And his mother answering

"That's right, James; it'll be ever so much more comfy."

CHAPTER IX--OUT OF THE WEB

On Forsyte 'Change the announcement of Jolly's death, among a batch of

troopers, caused mixed sensation. Strange to read that Jolyon Forsyte

(fifth of the name in direct descent) had died of disease in the service

of his country, and not be able to feel it personally. It revived the

old grudge against his father for having estranged himself. For such

was still the prestige of old Jolyon that the other Forsytes could never

quite feel, as might have been expected, that it was they who had cut

off his descendants for irregularity. The news increased, of course, the

interest and anxiety about Val; but then Val's name was Dartie, and even

if he were killed in battle or got the Victoria Cross, it would not be

at all the same as if his name were Forsyte. Not even casualty or

glory to the Haymans would be really satisfactory. Family pride felt

defrauded.

How the rumour arose, then, that 'something very dreadful, my dear,'

was pending, no one, least of all Soames, could tell, secret as he kept

everything. Possibly some eye had seen 'Forsyte v. Forsyte and Forsyte,'

in the cause list; and had added it to 'Irene in Paris with a fair

beard.' Possibly some wall at Park Lane had ears. The fact remained that

it was known--whispered among the old, discussed among the young--that

family pride must soon receive a blow.

Soames, paying one, of his Sunday visits to Timothy's--paying it with

the feeling that after the suit came on he would be paying no more--felt

knowledge in the air as he came in. Nobody, of course, dared speak of

it before him, but each of the four other Forsytes present held their

breath, aware that nothing could prevent Aunt Juley from making them all

uncomfortable. She looked so piteously at Soames, she checked herself on

the point of speech so often, that Aunt Hester excused herself and

said she must go and bathe Timothy's eye--he had a sty coming. Soames,

impassive, slightly supercilious, did not stay long. He went out with a

curse stifled behind his pale, just smiling lips.

Fortunately for the peace of his mind, cruelly tortured by the

coming scandal, he was kept busy day and night with plans for his

retirement--for he had come to that grim conclusion. To go on seeing

all those people who had known him as a 'long-headed chap,' an astute

adviser--after that--no! The fastidiousness and pride which was so

strangely, so inextricably blended in him with possessive obtuseness,

revolted against the thought. He would retire, live privately, go on

buying pictures, make a great name as a collector--after all, his heart

was more in that than it had ever been in Law. In pursuance of this

now fixed resolve, he had to get ready to amalgamate his business

with another firm without letting people know, for that would excite

curiosity and make humiliation cast its shadow before. He had pitched on

the firm of Cuthcott, Holliday and Kingson, two of whom were dead. The

full name after the amalgamation would therefore be Cuthcott, Holliday,

Kingson, Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte. But after debate as to which

of the dead still had any influence with the living, it was decided to

reduce the title to Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte, of whom Kingson would

be the active and Soames the sleeping partner. For leaving his name,

prestige, and clients behind him, Soames would receive considerable

value.

One night, as befitted a man who had arrived at so important a stage

of his career, he made a calculation of what he was worth, and after

writing off liberally for depreciation by the war, found his value to

be some hundred and thirty thousand pounds. At his father's death, which

could not, alas, be delayed much longer, he must come into at least

another fifty thousand, and his yearly expenditure at present just

reached two. Standing among his pictures, he saw before him a future

full of bargains earned by the trained faculty of knowing better than

other people. Selling what was about to decline, keeping what was still

going up, and exercising judicious insight into future taste, he would

make a unique collection, which at his death would pass to the nation

under the title 'Forsyte Bequest.'

If the divorce went through, he had determined on his line with Madame

Lamotte. She had, he knew, but one real ambition--to live on her

'renter' in Paris near her grandchildren. He would buy the goodwill

of the Restaurant Bretagne at a fancy price. Madame would live like a

Queen-Mother in Paris on the interest, invested as she would know how.

(Incidentally Soames meant to put a capable manager in her place, and

make the restaurant pay good interest on his money. There were great

possibilities in Soho.) On Annette he would promise to settle fifteen

thousand pounds (whether designedly or not), precisely the sum old

Jolyon had settled on 'that woman.'

A letter from Jolyon's solicitor to his own had disclosed the fact that

'those two' were in Italy. And an opportunity had been duly given for

noting that they had first stayed at an hotel in London. The matter was

clear as daylight, and would be disposed of in half an hour or so; but

during that half-hour he, Soames, would go down to hell; and after that

half-hour all bearers of the Forsyte name would feel the bloom was off

the rose. He had no illusions like Shakespeare that roses by any other

name would smell as sweet. The name was a possession, a concrete,

unstained piece of property, the value of which would be reduced some

twenty per cent. at least. Unless it were Roger, who had once refused to

stand for Parliament, and--oh, irony!--Jolyon, hung on the line,

there had never been a distinguished Forsyte. But that very lack of

distinction was the name's greatest asset. It was a private name,

intensely individual, and his own property; it had never been exploited

for good or evil by intrusive report. He and each member of his family

owned it wholly, sanely, secretly, without any more interference from

the public than had been necessitated by their births, their marriages,

their deaths. And during these weeks of waiting and preparing to drop

the Law, he conceived for that Law a bitter distaste, so deeply did he

resent its coming violation of his name, forced on him by the need he

felt to perpetuate that name in a lawful manner. The monstrous injustice

of the whole thing excited in him a perpetual suppressed fury. He had

asked no better than to live in spotless domesticity, and now he must go

into the witness box, after all these futile, barren years, and proclaim

his failure to keep his wife--incur the pity, the amusement, the

contempt of his kind. It was all upside down. She and that fellow ought

to be the sufferers, and they--were in Italy! In these weeks the Law he

had served so faithfully, looked on so reverently as the guardian of all

property, seemed to him quite pitiful. What could be more insane than

to tell a man that he owned his wife, and punish him when someone

unlawfully took her away from him? Did the Law not know that a man's

name was to him the apple of his eye, that it was far harder to be

regarded as cuckold than as seducer? He actually envied Jolyon the

reputation of succeeding where he, Soames, had failed. The question of

damages worried him, too. He wanted to make that fellow suffer, but he

remembered his cousin's words, "I shall be very happy," with the uneasy

feeling that to claim damages would make not Jolyon but himself suffer;

he felt uncannily that Jolyon would rather like to pay them--the chap

was so loose. Besides, to claim damages was not the thing to do. The

claim, indeed, had been made almost mechanically; and as the hour

drew near Soames saw in it just another dodge of this insensitive and

topsy-turvy Law to make him ridiculous; so that people might sneer

and say: "Oh, yes, he got quite a good price for her!" And he gave

instructions that his Counsel should state that the money would be given

to a Home for Fallen Women. He was a long time hitting off exactly the

right charity; but, having pitched on it, he used to wake up in

the night and think: 'It won't do, too lurid; it'll draw attention.

Something quieter--better taste.' He did not care for dogs, or he would

have named them; and it was in desperation at last--for his knowledge of

charities was limited--that he decided on the blind. That could not be

inappropriate, and it would make the Jury assess the damages high.

A good many suits were dropping out of the list, which happened to be

exceptionally thin that summer, so that his case would be reached before

August. As the day grew nearer, Winifred was his only comfort. She

showed the fellow-feeling of one who had been through the mill, and was

the 'femme-sole' in whom he confided, well knowing that she would not

let Dartie into her confidence. That ruffian would be only too rejoiced!

At the end of July, on the afternoon before the case, he went in to

see her. They had not yet been able to leave town, because Dartie had

already spent their summer holiday, and Winifred dared not go to her

father for more money while he was waiting not to be told anything about

this affair of Soames.

Soames found her with a letter in her hand.

"That from Val," he asked gloomily. "What does he say?"

"He says he's married," said Winifred.

"Whom to, for Goodness' sake?"

Winifred looked up at him.

"To Holly Forsyte, Jolyon's daughter."

"What?"

"He got leave and did it. I didn't even know he knew her. Awkward, isn't

it?"

Soames uttered a short laugh at that characteristic minimisation.

"Awkward! Well, I don't suppose they'll hear about this till they come

back. They'd better stay out there. That fellow will give her money."

"But I want Val back," said Winifred almost piteously; "I miss him, he

helps me to get on."

"I know," murmured Soames. "How's Dartie behaving now?"

"It might be worse; but it's always money. Would you like me to come

down to the Court to-morrow, Soames?"

Soames stretched out his hand for hers. The gesture so betrayed the

loneliness in him that she pressed it between her two.

"Never mind, old boy. You'll feel ever so much better when it's all

over."

"I don't know what I've done," said Soames huskily; "I never have. It's

all upside down. I was fond of her; I've always been."

Winifred saw a drop of blood ooze out of his lip, and the sight stirred

her profoundly.

"Of course," she said, "it's been too bad of her all along! But what

shall I do about this marriage of Val's, Soames? I don't know how

to write to him, with this coming on. You've seen that child. Is she

pretty?"

"Yes, she's pretty," said Soames. "Dark--lady-like enough."

'That doesn't sound so bad,' thought Winifred. 'Jolyon had style.'

"It is a coil," she said. "What will father say?

"Mustn't be told," said Soames. "The war'll soon be over now, you'd

better let Val take to farming out there."

It was tantamount to saying that his nephew was lost.

"I haven't told Monty," Winifred murmured desolately.

The case was reached before noon next day, and was over in little

more than half an hour. Soames--pale, spruce, sad-eyed in the

witness-box--had suffered so much beforehand that he took it all like

one dead. The moment the decree nisi was pronounced he left the Courts

of Justice.

Four hours until he became public property! 'Solicitor's divorce suit!'

A surly, dogged anger replaced that dead feeling within him. 'Damn

them all!' he thought; 'I won't run away. I'll act as if nothing had

happened.' And in the sweltering heat of Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill

he walked all the way to his City Club, lunched, and went back to his

office. He worked there stolidly throughout the afternoon.

On his way out he saw that his clerks knew, and answered their

involuntary glances with a look so sardonic that they were immediately

withdrawn. In front of St. Paul's, he stopped to buy the most

gentlemanly of the evening papers. Yes! there he was! 'Well-known

solicitor's divorce. Cousin co-respondent. Damages given to the

blind'--so, they had got that in! At every other face, he thought: 'I

wonder if you know!' And suddenly he felt queer, as if something were

racing round in his head.

What was this? He was letting it get hold of him! He mustn't! He would

be ill. He mustn't think! He would get down to the river and row about,

and fish. 'I'm not going to be laid up,' he thought.

It flashed across him that he had something of importance to do before

he went out of town. Madame Lamotte! He must explain the Law. Another

six months before he was really free! Only he did not want to see

Annette! And he passed his hand over the top of his head--it was very

hot.

He branched off through Covent Garden. On this sultry day of late July

the garbage-tainted air of the old market offended him, and Soho seemed

more than ever the disenchanted home of rapscallionism. Alone, the

Restaurant Bretagne, neat, daintily painted, with its blue tubs and the

dwarf trees therein, retained an aloof and Frenchified self-respect. It

was the slack hour, and pale trim waitresses were preparing the little

tables for dinner. Soames went through into the private part. To his

discomfiture Annette answered his knock. She, too, looked pale and

dragged down by the heat.

"You are quite a stranger," she said languidly.

Soames smiled.

"I haven't wished to be; I've been busy."

"Where's your mother, Annette? I've got some news for her."

"Mother is not in."

It seemed to Soames that she looked at him in a queer way. What did she

know? How much had her mother told her? The worry of trying to make that

out gave him an alarming feeling in the head. He gripped the edge of

the table, and dizzily saw Annette come forward, her eyes clear with

surprise. He shut his own and said:

"It's all right. I've had a touch of the sun, I think." The sun! What

he had was a touch of 'darkness! Annette's voice, French and composed,

said:

"Sit down, it will pass, then." Her hand pressed his shoulder, and

Soames sank into a chair. When the dark feeling dispersed, and he opened

his eyes, she was looking down at him. What an inscrutable and odd

expression for a girl of twenty!

"Do you feel better?"

"It's nothing," said Soames. Instinct told him that to be feeble

before her was not helping him--age was enough handicap without that.

Will-power was his fortune with Annette, he had lost ground these latter

months from indecision--he could not afford to lose any more. He got up,

and said:

"I'll write to your mother. I'm going down to my river house for a long

holiday. I want you both to come there presently and stay. It's just at

its best. You will, won't you?"

"It will be veree nice." A pretty little roll of that 'r' but no

enthusiasm. And rather sadly he added:

"You're feeling the heat; too, aren't you, Annette? It'll do you good to

be on the river. Good-night." Annette swayed forward. There was a sort

of compunction in the movement.

"Are you fit to go? Shall I give you some coffee?"

"No," said Soames firmly. "Give me your hand."

She held out her hand, and Soames raised it to his lips. When he looked

up, her face wore again that strange expression. 'I can't tell,' he

thought, as he went out; 'but I mustn't think--I mustn't worry:

But worry he did, walking toward Pall Mall. English, not of her

religion, middle-aged, scarred as it were by domestic tragedy, what had

he to give her? Only wealth, social position, leisure, admiration! It

was much, but was it enough for a beautiful girl of twenty? He felt so

ignorant about Annette. He had, too, a curious fear of the French nature

of her mother and herself. They knew so well what they wanted. They were

almost Forsytes. They would never grasp a shadow and miss a substance.

The tremendous effort it was to write a simple note to Madame Lamotte

when he reached his Club warned him still further that he was at the end

of his tether.

"MY DEAR MADAME (he said),

"You will see by the enclosed newspaper cutting that I obtained my

decree of divorce to-day. By the English Law I shall not, however, be

free to marry again till the decree is confirmed six months hence. In

the meanwhile I have the honor to ask to be considered a formal suitor

for the hand of your daughter. I shall write again in a few days and beg

you both to come and stay at my river house.

"I am, dear Madame,

"Sincerely yours,

"SOAMES FORSYTE."

Having sealed and posted this letter, he went into the dining-room.

Three mouthfuls of soup convinced him that he could not eat; and,

causing a cab to be summoned, he drove to Paddington Station and took

the first train to Reading. He reached his house just as the sun went

down, and wandered out on to the lawn. The air was drenched with the

scent of pinks and picotees in his flower-borders. A stealing coolness

came off the river.

Rest-peace! Let a poor fellow rest! Let not worry and shame and anger

chase like evil night-birds in his head! Like those doves perched

half-sleeping on their dovecot, like the furry creatures in the woods on

the far side, and the simple folk in their cottages, like the trees

and the river itself, whitening fast in twilight, like the darkening

cornflower-blue sky where stars were coming up--let him cease from

himself, and rest!

CHAPTER X--PASSING OF AN AGE

The marriage of Soames with Annette took place in Paris on the last day

of January, 1901, with such privacy that not even Emily was told until

it was accomplished.

The day after the wedding he brought her to one of those quiet hotels

in London where greater expense can be incurred for less result than

anywhere else under heaven. Her beauty in the best Parisian frocks was

giving him more satisfaction than if he had collected a perfect bit of

china, or a jewel of a picture; he looked forward to the moment when he

would exhibit her in Park Lane, in Green Street, and at Timothy's.

If some one had asked him in those days, "In confidence--are you in love

with this girl?" he would have replied: "In love? What is love? If you

mean do I feel to her as I did towards Irene in those old days when I

first met her and she would not have me; when I sighed and starved after

her and couldn't rest a minute until she yielded--no! If you mean do I

admire her youth and prettiness, do my senses ache a little when I see

her moving about--yes! Do I think she will keep me straight, make me a

creditable wife and a good mother for my children?--again, yes!"

"What more do I need? and what more do three-quarters of the women who

are married get from the men who marry them?" And if the enquirer had

pursued his query, "And do you think it was fair to have tempted this

girl to give herself to you for life unless you have really touched her

heart?" he would have answered: "The French see these things differently

from us. They look at marriage from the point of view of establishments

and children; and, from my own experience, I am not at all sure that

theirs is not the sensible view. I shall not expect this time more than

I can get, or she can give. Years hence I shouldn't be surprised if I

have trouble with her; but I shall be getting old, I shall have children

by then. I shall shut my eyes. I have had my great passion; hers is

perhaps to come--I don't suppose it will be for me. I offer her a great

deal, and I don't expect much in return, except children, or at least a

son. But one thing I am sure of--she has very good sense!"

And if, insatiate, the enquirer had gone on, "You do not look, then, for

spiritual union in this marriage?" Soames would have lifted his sideway

smile, and rejoined: "That's as it may be. If I get satisfaction for my

senses, perpetuation of myself; good taste and good humour in the house;

it is all I can expect at my age. I am not likely to be going out of my

way towards any far-fetched sentimentalism." Whereon, the enquirer must

in good taste have ceased enquiry.

The Queen was dead, and the air of the greatest city upon earth grey

with unshed tears. Fur-coated and top-hatted, with Annette beside him

in dark furs, Soames crossed Park Lane on the morning of the funeral

procession, to the rails in Hyde Park. Little moved though he ever was

by public matters, this event, supremely symbolical, this summing-up of

a long rich period, impressed his fancy. In '37, when she came to the

throne, 'Superior Dosset' was still building houses to make London

hideous; and James, a stripling of twenty-six, just laying the

foundations of his practice in the Law. Coaches still ran; men wore

stocks, shaved their upper lips, ate oysters out of barrels; 'tigers'

swung behind cabriolets; women said, 'La!' and owned no property; there

were manners in the land, and pigsties for the poor; unhappy devils

were hanged for little crimes, and Dickens had but just begun to write.

Well-nigh two generations had slipped by--of steamboats, railways,

telegraphs, bicycles, electric light, telephones, and now these

motorcars--of such accumulated wealth, that eight per cent. had become

three, and Forsytes were numbered by the thousand! Morals had changed,

manners had changed, men had become monkeys twice-removed, God had

become Mammon--Mammon so respectable as to deceive himself: Sixty-four

years that favoured property, and had made the upper middle class;

buttressed, chiselled, polished it, till it was almost indistinguishable

in manners, morals, speech, appearance, habit, and soul from the

nobility. An epoch which had gilded individual liberty so that if a man

had money, he was free in law and fact, and if he had not money he was

free in law and not in fact. An era which had canonised hypocrisy, so

that to seem to be respectable was to be. A great Age, whose transmuting

influence nothing had escaped save the nature of man and the nature of

the Universe.

And to witness the passing of this Age, London--its pet and fancy--was

pouring forth her citizens through every gate into Hyde Park, hub of

Victorianism, happy hunting-ground of Forsytes. Under the grey heavens,

whose drizzle just kept off, the dark concourse gathered to see the

show. The 'good old' Queen, full of years and virtue, had emerged

from her seclusion for the last time to make a London holiday. From

Houndsditch, Acton, Ealing, Hampstead, Islington, and Bethnal Green;

from Hackney, Hornsey, Leytonstone, Battersea, and Fulham; and from

those green pastures where Forsytes flourish--Mayfair and Kensington,

St. James' and Belgravia, Bayswater and Chelsea and the Regent's Park,

the people swarmed down on to the roads where death would presently pass

with dusky pomp and pageantry. Never again would a Queen reign so long,

or people have a chance to see so much history buried for their money.

A pity the war dragged on, and that the Wreath of Victory could not

be laid upon her coffin! All else would be there to follow and

commemorate--soldiers, sailors, foreign princes, half-masted bunting,

tolling bells, and above all the surging, great, dark-coated crowd, with

perhaps a simple sadness here and there deep in hearts beneath black

clothes put on by regulation. After all, more than a Queen was going to

her rest, a woman who had braved sorrow, lived well and wisely according

to her lights.

Out in the crowd against the railings, with his arm hooked in Annette's,

Soames waited. Yes! the Age was passing! What with this Trade Unionism,

and Labour fellows in the House of Commons, with continental fiction,

and something in the general feel of everything, not to be expressed

in words, things were very different; he recalled the crowd on Mafeking

night, and George Forsyte saying: "They're all socialists, they want our

goods." Like James, Soames didn't know, he couldn't tell--with Edward on

the throne! Things would never be as safe again as under good old Viccy!

Convulsively he pressed his young wife's arm. There, at any rate, was

something substantially his own, domestically certain again at last;

something which made property worth while--a real thing once more.

Pressed close against her and trying to ward others off, Soames was

content. The crowd swayed round them, ate sandwiches and dropped crumbs;

boys who had climbed the plane-trees chattered above like monkeys, threw

twigs and orange-peel. It was past time; they should be coming soon!

And, suddenly, a little behind them to the left, he saw a tallish man

with a soft hat and short grizzling beard, and a tallish woman in a

little round fur cap and veil. Jolyon and Irene talking, smiling at each

other, close together like Annette and himself! They had not seen him;

and stealthily, with a very queer feeling in his heart, Soames watched

those two. They looked happy! What had they come here for--inherently

illicit creatures, rebels from the Victorian ideal? What business had

they in this crowd? Each of them twice exiled by morality--making a

boast, as it were, of love and laxity! He watched them fascinated;

admitting grudgingly even with his arm thrust through Annette's

that--that she--Irene--No! he would not admit it; and he turned his eyes

away. He would not see them, and let the old bitterness, the old longing

rise up within him! And then Annette turned to him and said: "Those two

people, Soames; they know you, I am sure. Who are they?"

Soames nosed sideways.

"What people?"

"There, you see them; just turning away. They know you."

"No," Soames answered; "a mistake, my dear."

"A lovely face! And how she walk! Elle est tres distinguee!"

Soames looked then. Into his life, out of his life she had walked like

that swaying and erect, remote, unseizable; ever eluding the contact of

his soul! He turned abruptly from that receding vision of the past.

"You'd better attend," he said, "they're coming now!"

But while he stood, grasping her arm, seemingly intent on the head

of the procession, he was quivering with the sense of always missing

something, with instinctive regret that he had not got them both.

Slow came the music and the march, till, in silence, the long line wound

in through the Park gate. He heard Annette whisper, "How sad it is and

beautiful!" felt the clutch of her hand as she stood up on tiptoe; and

the crowd's emotion gripped him. There it was--the bier of the Queen,

coffin of the Age slow passing! And as it went by there came a murmuring

groan from all the long line of those who watched, a sound such as

Soames had never heard, so unconscious, primitive, deep and wild, that

neither he nor any knew whether they had joined in uttering it. Strange

sound, indeed! Tribute of an Age to its own death.... Ah! Ah!... The

hold on life had slipped. That which had seemed eternal was gone! The

Queen--God bless her!

It moved on with the bier, that travelling groan, as a fire moves on

over grass in a thin line; it kept step, and marched alongside down the

dense crowds mile after mile. It was a human sound, and yet inhuman,

pushed out by animal subconsciousness, by intimate knowledge of

universal death and change. None of us--none of us can hold on for ever!

It left silence for a little--a very little time, till tongues began,

eager to retrieve interest in the show. Soames lingered just long

enough to gratify Annette, then took her out of the Park to lunch at his

father's in Park Lane....

James had spent the morning gazing out of his bedroom window. The last

show he would see, last of so many! So she was gone! Well, she was

getting an old woman. Swithin and he had seen her crowned--slim slip of

a girl, not so old as Imogen! She had got very stout of late. Jolyon and

he had seen her married to that German chap, her husband--he had turned

out all right before he died, and left her with that son of his. And he

remembered the many evenings he and his brothers and their cronies had

wagged their heads over their wine and walnuts and that fellow in his

salad days. And now he had come to the throne. They said he had steadied

down--he didn't know--couldn't tell! He'd make the money fly still, he

shouldn't wonder. What a lot of people out there! It didn't seem so very

long since he and Swithin stood in the crowd outside Westminster

Abbey when she was crowned, and Swithin had taken him to Cremorne

afterwards--racketty chap, Swithin; no, it didn't seem much longer ago

than Jubilee Year, when he had joined with Roger in renting a balcony in

Piccadilly.

Jolyon, Swithin, Roger all gone, and he would be ninety in August! And

there was Soames married again to a French girl. The French were a queer

lot, but they made good mothers, he had heard. Things changed! They said

this German Emperor was here for the funeral, his telegram to old Kruger

had been in shocking taste. He should not be surprised if that chap made

trouble some day. Change! H'm! Well, they must look after themselves

when he was gone: he didn't know where he'd be! And now Emily had asked

Dartie to lunch, with Winifred and Imogen, to meet Soames' wife--she

was always doing something. And there was Irene living with that fellow

Jolyon, they said. He'd marry her now, he supposed.

'My brother Jolyon,' he thought, 'what would he have said to it all?'

And somehow the utter impossibility of knowing what his elder brother,

once so looked up to, would have said, so worried James that he got up

from his chair by the window, and began slowly, feebly to pace the room.

'She was a pretty thing, too,' he thought; 'I was fond of her. Perhaps

Soames didn't suit her--I don't know--I can't tell. We never had any

trouble with our wives.' Women had changed everything had changed! And

now the Queen was dead--well, there it was! A movement in the crowd

brought him to a standstill at the window, his nose touching the pane

and whitening from the chill of it. They had got her as far as Hyde Park

Corner--they were passing now! Why didn't Emily come up here where

she could see, instead of fussing about lunch. He missed her at that

moment--missed her! Through the bare branches of the plane-trees

he could just see the procession, could see the hats coming off the

people's heads--a lot of them would catch colds, he shouldn't wonder! A

voice behind him said:

"You've got a capital view here, James!"

"There you are!" muttered James; "why didn't you come before? You might

have missed it!"

And he was silent, staring with all his might.

"What's the noise?" he asked suddenly.

"There's no noise," returned Emily; "what are you thinking of?--they

wouldn't cheer."

"I can hear it."

"Nonsense, James!"

No sound came through those double panes; what James heard was the

groaning in his own heart at sight of his Age passing.

"Don't you ever tell me where I'm buried," he said suddenly. "I shan't

want to know." And he turned from the window. There she went, the old

Queen; she'd had a lot of anxiety--she'd be glad to be out of it, he

should think!

Emily took up the hair-brushes.

"There'll be just time to brush your head," she said, "before they come.

You must look your best, James."

"Ah!" muttered James; "they say she's pretty."

The meeting with his new daughter-in-law took place in the dining-room.

James was seated by the fire when she was brought in. He placed, his

hands on the arms of the chair and slowly raised himself. Stooping and

immaculate in his frock-coat, thin as a line in Euclid, he received

Annette's hand in his; and the anxious eyes of his furrowed face, which

had lost its colour now, doubted above her. A little warmth came into

them and into his cheeks, refracted from her bloom.

"How are you?" he said. "You've been to see the Queen, I suppose? Did

you have a good crossing?"

In this way he greeted her from whom he hoped for a grandson of his

name.

Gazing at him, so old, thin, white, and spotless, Annette murmured

something in French which James did not understand.

"Yes, yes," he said, "you want your lunch, I expect. Soames, ring the

bell; we won't wait for that chap Dartie." But just then they arrived.

Dartie had refused to go out of his way to see 'the old girl.' With an

early cocktail beside him, he had taken a 'squint' from the smoking-room

of the Iseeum, so that Winifred and Imogen had been obliged to come back

from the Park to fetch him thence. His brown eyes rested on Annette with

a stare of almost startled satisfaction. The second beauty that fellow

Soames had picked up! What women could see in him! Well, she would play

him the same trick as the other, no doubt; but in the meantime he was a

lucky devil! And he brushed up his moustache, having in nine months

of Green Street domesticity regained almost all his flesh and his

assurance. Despite the comfortable efforts of Emily, Winifred's

composure, Imogen's enquiring friendliness, Dartie's showing-off, and

James' solicitude about her food, it was not, Soames felt, a successful

lunch for his bride. He took her away very soon.

"That Monsieur Dartie," said Annette in the cab, "je n'aime pas ce

type-la!"

"No, by George!" said Soames.

"Your sister is veree amiable, and the girl is pretty. Your father is

veree old. I think your mother has trouble with him; I should not like

to be her."

Soames nodded at the shrewdness, the clear hard judgment in his young

wife; but it disquieted him a little. The thought may have just flashed

through him, too: 'When I'm eighty she'll be fifty-five, having trouble

with me!'

"There's just one other house of my relations I must take you to," he

said; "you'll find it funny, but we must get it over; and then we'll

dine and go to the theatre."

In this way he prepared her for Timothy's. But Timothy's was different.

They were delighted to see dear Soames after this long long time; and so

this was Annette!

"You are so pretty, my dear; almost too young and pretty for dear

Soames, aren't you? But he's very attentive and careful--such a good

hush...." Aunt Juley checked herself, and placed her lips just under

each of Annette's eyes--she afterwards described them to Francie, who

dropped in, as: "Cornflower-blue, so pretty, I quite wanted to kiss

them. I must say dear Soames is a perfect connoisseur. In her French

way, and not so very French either, I think she's as pretty--though not

so distinguished, not so alluring--as Irene. Because she was alluring,

wasn't she? with that white skin and those dark eyes, and that hair,

couleur de--what was it? I always forget."

"Feuille morte," Francie prompted.

"Of course, dead leaves--so strange. I remember when I was a girl,

before we came to London, we had a foxhound puppy--to 'walk' it was

called then; it had a tan top to its head and a white chest, and

beautiful dark brown eyes, and it was a lady."

"Yes, auntie," said Francie, "but I don't see the connection."

"Oh!" replied Aunt Juley, rather flustered, "it was so alluring, and

her eyes and hair, you know...." She was silent, as if surprised in some

indelicacy. "Feuille morte," she added suddenly; "Hester--do remember

that!"....

Considerable debate took place between the two sisters whether Timothy

should or should not be summoned to see Annette.

"Oh, don't bother!" said Soames.

"But it's no trouble, only of course Annette's being French might upset

him a little. He was so scared about Fashoda. I think perhaps we had

better not run the risk, Hester. It's nice to have her all to ourselves,

isn't it? And how are you, Soames? Have you quite got over your...."

Hester interposed hurriedly:

"What do you think of London, Annette?"

Soames, disquieted, awaited the reply. It came, sensible, composed: "Oh!

I know London. I have visited before."

He had never ventured to speak to her on the subject of the restaurant.

The French had different notions about gentility, and to shrink from

connection with it might seem to her ridiculous; he had waited to be

married before mentioning it; and now he wished he hadn't.

"And what part do you know best?" said Aunt Juley.

"Soho," said Annette simply.

Soames snapped his jaw.

"Soho?" repeated Aunt Juley; "Soho?"

'That'll go round the family,' thought Soames.

"It's very French, and interesting," he said.

"Yes," murmured Aunt Juley, "your Uncle Roger had some houses there

once; he was always having to turn the tenants out, I remember."

Soames changed the subject to Mapledurham.

"Of course," said Aunt Juley, "you will be going down there soon to

settle in. We are all so looking forward to the time when Annette has a

dear little...."

"Juley!" cried Aunt Hester desperately, "ring tea!"

Soames dared not wait for tea, and took Annette away.

"I shouldn't mention Soho if I were you," he said in the cab. "It's

rather a shady part of London; and you're altogether above that

restaurant business now; I mean," he added, "I want you to know nice

people, and the English are fearful snobs."

Annette's clear eyes opened; a little smile came on her lips.

"Yes?" she said.

'H'm!' thought Soames, 'that's meant for me!' and he looked at her hard.

'She's got good business instincts,' he thought. 'I must make her grasp

it once for all!'

"Look here, Annette! it's very simple, only it wants understanding. Our

professional and leisured classes still think themselves a cut above our

business classes, except of course the very rich. It may be stupid, but

there it is, you see. It isn't advisable in England to let people know

that you ran a restaurant or kept a shop or were in any kind of trade.

It may have been extremely creditable, but it puts a sort of label on

you; you don't have such a good time, or meet such nice people--that's

all."

"I see," said Annette; "it is the same in France."

"Oh!" murmured Soames, at once relieved and taken aback. "Of course,

class is everything, really."

"Yes," said Annette; "comme vous etes sage."

'That's all right,' thought Soames, watching her lips, 'only she's

pretty cynical.' His knowledge of French was not yet such as to make

him grieve that she had not said 'tu.' He slipped his arm round her, and

murmured with an effort:

"Et vous etes ma belle femme."

Annette went off into a little fit of laughter.

"Oh, non!" she said. "Oh, non! ne parlez pas Francais, Soames. What is

that old lady, your aunt, looking forward to?"

Soames bit his lip. "God knows!" he said; "she's always saying

something;" but he knew better than God.

CHAPTER XI--SUSPENDED ANIMATION

The war dragged on. Nicholas had been heard to say that it would cost

three hundred millions if it cost a penny before they'd done with it!

The income-tax was seriously threatened. Still, there would be South

Africa for their money, once for all. And though the possessive instinct

felt badly shaken at three o'clock in the morning, it recovered by

breakfast-time with the recollection that one gets nothing in this

world without paying for it. So, on the whole, people went about their

business much as if there were no war, no concentration camps, no

slippery de Wet, no feeling on the Continent, no anything unpleasant.

Indeed, the attitude of the nation was typified by Timothy's map, whose

animation was suspended--for Timothy no longer moved the flags, and

they could not move themselves, not even backwards and forwards as they

should have done.

Suspended animation went further; it invaded Forsyte 'Change, and

produced a general uncertainty as to what was going to happen next. The

announcement in the marriage column of The Times, 'Jolyon Forsyte to

Irene, only daughter of the late Professor Heron,' had occasioned doubt

whether Irene had been justly described. And yet, on the whole, relief

was felt that she had not been entered as 'Irene, late the wife,' or

'the divorced wife,' 'of Soames Forsyte.' Altogether, there had been a

kind of sublimity from the first about the way the family had taken

that 'affair.' As James had phrased it, 'There it was!' No use to fuss!

Nothing to be had out of admitting that it had been a 'nasty jar'--in

the phraseology of the day.

But what would happen now that both Soames and Jolyon were married

again? That was very intriguing. George was known to have laid Eustace

six to four on a little Jolyon before a little Soames. George was so

droll! It was rumoured, too, that he and Dartie had a bet as to whether

James would attain the age of ninety, though which of them had backed

James no one knew.

Early in May, Winifred came round to say that Val had been wounded

in the leg by a spent bullet, and was to be discharged. His wife was

nursing him. He would have a little limp--nothing to speak of. He wanted

his grandfather to buy him a farm out there where he could breed horses.

Her father was giving Holly eight hundred a year, so they could be quite

comfortable, because his grandfather would give Val five, he had said;

but as to the farm, he didn't know--couldn't tell: he didn't want Val to

go throwing away his money.

"But you know," said Winifred, "he must do something."

Aunt Hester thought that perhaps his dear grandfather was wise, because

if he didn't buy a farm it couldn't turn out badly.

"But Val loves horses," said Winifred. "It'd be such an occupation for

him."

Aunt Juley thought that horses were very uncertain, had not Montague

found them so?

"Val's different," said Winifred; "he takes after me."

Aunt Juley was sure that dear Val was very clever. "I always remember,"

she added, "how he gave his bad penny to a beggar. His dear grandfather

was so pleased. He thought it showed such presence of mind. I remember

his saying that he ought to go into the Navy."

Aunt Hester chimed in: Did not Winifred think that it was much better

for the young people to be secure and not run any risk at their age?

"Well," said Winifred, "if they were in London, perhaps; in London it's

amusing to do nothing. But out there, of course, he'll simply get bored

to death."

Aunt Hester thought that it would be nice for him to work, if he were

quite sure not to lose by it. It was not as if they had no money.

Timothy, of course, had done so well by retiring. Aunt Juley wanted to

know what Montague had said.

Winifred did not tell her, for Montague had merely remarked: "Wait till

the old man dies."

At this moment Francie was announced. Her eyes were brimming with a

smile.

"Well," she said, "what do you think of it?"

"Of what, dear?"

"In The Times this morning."

"We haven't seen it, we always read it after dinner; Timothy has it till

then."

Francie rolled her eyes.

"Do you think you ought to tell us?" said Aunt Juley. "What was it?"

"Irene's had a son at Robin Hill."

Aunt Juley drew in her breath. "But," she said, "they were only married

in March!"

"Yes, Auntie; isn't it interesting?"

"Well," said Winifred, "I'm glad. I was sorry for Jolyon losing his boy.

It might have been Val."

Aunt Juley seemed to go into a sort of dream. "I wonder," she murmured,

"what dear Soames will think? He has so wanted to have a son himself. A

little bird has always told me that."

"Well," said Winifred, "he's going to--bar accidents."

Gladness trickled out of Aunt Juley's eyes.

"How delightful!" she said. "When?"

"November."

Such a lucky month! But she did wish it could be sooner. It was a long

time for James to wait, at his age!

To wait! They dreaded it for James, but they were used to it themselves.

Indeed, it was their great distraction. To wait! For The Times to read;

for one or other of their nieces or nephews to come in and cheer them

up; for news of Nicholas' health; for that decision of Christopher's

about going on the stage; for information concerning the mine of Mrs.

MacAnder's nephew; for the doctor to come about Hester's inclination

to wake up early in the morning; for books from the library which were

always out; for Timothy to have a cold; for a nice quiet warm day, not

too hot, when they could take a turn in Kensington Gardens. To wait, one

on each side of the hearth in the drawing-room, for the clock

between them to strike; their thin, veined, knuckled hands plying

knitting-needles and crochet-hooks, their hair ordered to stop--like

Canute's waves--from any further advance in colour. To wait in their

black silks or satins for the Court to say that Hester might wear her

dark green, and Juley her darker maroon. To wait, slowly turning over

and over, in their old minds the little joys and sorrows, events and

expectancies, of their little family world, as cows chew patient cuds

in a familiar field. And this new event was so well worth waiting

for. Soames had always been their pet, with his tendency to give them

pictures, and his almost weekly visits which they missed so much, and

his need for their sympathy evoked by the wreck of his first marriage.

This new event--the birth of an heir to Soames--was so important for

him, and for his dear father, too, that James might not have to die

without some certainty about things. James did so dislike uncertainty;

and with Montague, of course, he could not feel really satisfied to

leave no grand-children but the young Darties. After all, one's own name

did count! And as James' ninetieth birthday neared they wondered what

precautions he was taking. He would be the first of the Forsytes to

reach that age, and set, as it were, a new standard in holding on to

life. That was so important, they felt, at their ages eighty-seven and

eighty-five; though they did not want to think of themselves when they

had Timothy, who was not yet eighty-two, to think of. There was, of

course, a better world. 'In my Father's house are many mansions' was

one of Aunt Juley's favourite sayings--it always comforted her, with its

suggestion of house property, which had made the fortune of dear Roger.

The Bible was, indeed, a great resource, and on very fine Sundays

there was church in the morning; and sometimes Juley would steal into

Timothy's study when she was sure he was out, and just put an open New

Testament casually among the books on his little table--he was a great

reader, of course, having been a publisher. But she had noticed that

Timothy was always cross at dinner afterwards. And Smither had told

her more than once that she had picked books off the floor in doing the

room. Still, with all that, they did feel that heaven could not be quite

so cosy as the rooms in which they and Timothy had been waiting so long.

Aunt Hester, especially, could not bear the thought of the exertion.

Any change, or rather the thought of a change--for there never was

any--always upset her very much. Aunt Juley, who had more spirit,

sometimes thought it would be quite exciting; she had so enjoyed that

visit to Brighton the year dear Susan died. But then Brighton one knew

was nice, and it was so difficult to tell what heaven would be like, so

on the whole she was more than content to wait.

On the morning of James' birthday, August the 5th, they felt

extraordinary animation, and little notes passed between them by the

hand of Smither while they were having breakfast in their beds. Smither

must go round and take their love and little presents and find out

how Mr. James was, and whether he had passed a good night with all

the excitement. And on the way back would Smither call in at Green

Street--it was a little out of her way, but she could take the bus up

Bond Street afterwards; it would be a nice little change for her--and

ask dear Mrs. Dartie to be sure and look in before she went out of town.

All this Smither did--an undeniable servant trained many years ago under

Aunt Ann to a perfection not now procurable. Mr. James, so Mrs. James

said, had passed an excellent night, he sent his love; Mrs. James had

said he was very funny and had complained that he didn't know what all

the fuss was about. Oh! and Mrs. Dartie sent her love, and she would

come to tea.

Aunts Juley and Hester, rather hurt that their presents had not received

special mention--they forgot every year that James could not bear to

receive presents, 'throwing away their money on him,' as he always

called it--were 'delighted'; it showed that James was in good spirits,

and that was so important for him. And they began to wait for Winifred.

She came at four, bringing Imogen, and Maud, just back from school, and

'getting such a pretty girl, too,' so that it was extremely difficult

to ask for news about Annette. Aunt Juley, however, summoned courage to

enquire whether Winifred had heard anything, and if Soames was anxious.

"Uncle Soames is always anxious, Auntie," interrupted Imogen; "he can't

be happy now he's got it."

The words struck familiarly on Aunt Juley's ears. Ah! yes; that funny

drawing of George's, which had not been shown them! But what did Imogen

mean? That her uncle always wanted more than he could have? It was not

at all nice to think like that.

Imogen's voice rose clear and clipped:

"Imagine! Annette's only two years older than me; it must be awful for

her, married to Uncle Soames."

Aunt Juley lifted her hands in horror.

"My dear," she said, "you don't know what you're talking about. Your

Uncle Soames is a match for anybody. He's a very clever man, and

good-looking and wealthy, and most considerate and careful, and not at

all old, considering everything."

Imogen, turning her luscious glance from one to the other of the 'old

dears,' only smiled.

"I hope," said Aunt Juley quite severely, "that you will marry as good a

man."

"I shan't marry a good man, Auntie," murmured Imogen; "they're dull."

"If you go on like this," replied Aunt Juley, still very much upset,

"you won't marry anybody. We'd better not pursue the subject;" and

turning to Winifred, she said: "How is Montague?"

That evening, while they were waiting for dinner, she murmured:

"I've told Smither to get up half a bottle of the sweet champagne,

Hester. I think we ought to drink dear James' health, and--and the

health of Soames' wife; only, let's keep that quite secret. I'll just

say like this, 'And you know, Hester!' and then we'll drink. It might

upset Timothy."

"It's more likely to upset us," said Aunt Nester. "But we must, I

suppose; for such an occasion."

"Yes," said Aunt Juley rapturously, "it is an occasion! Only fancy if

he has a dear little boy, to carry the family on! I do feel it so

important, now that Irene has had a son. Winifred says George is calling

Jolyon 'The Three-Decker,' because of his three families, you know!

George is droll. And fancy! Irene is living after all in the house

Soames had built for them both. It does seem hard on dear Soames; and

he's always been so regular."

That night in bed, excited and a little flushed still by her glass of

wine and the secrecy of the second toast, she lay with her prayer-book

opened flat, and her eyes fixed on a ceiling yellowed by the light from

her reading-lamp. Young things! It was so nice for them all! And she

would be so happy if she could see dear Soames happy. But, of course, he

must be now, in spite of what Imogen had said. He would have all that he

wanted: property, and wife, and children! And he would live to a green

old age, like his dear father, and forget all about Irene and that

dreadful case. If only she herself could be here to buy his children

their first rocking-horse! Smither should choose it for her at the

stores, nice and dappled. Ah! how Roger used to rock her until she fell

off! Oh dear! that was a long time ago! It was! 'In my Father's house

are many mansions--'A little scrattling noise caught her ear--'but no

mice!' she thought mechanically. The noise increased. There! it was a

mouse! How naughty of Smither to say there wasn't! It would be eating

through the wainscot before they knew where they were, and they would

have to have the builders in. They were such destructive things! And

she lay, with her eyes just moving, following in her mind that little

scrattling sound, and waiting for sleep to release her from it.

CHAPTER XII--BIRTH OF A FORSYTE

Soames walked out of the garden door, crossed the lawn, stood on the

path above the river, turned round and walked back to the garden door,

without having realised that he had moved. The sound of wheels crunching

the drive convinced him that time had passed, and the doctor gone. What,

exactly, had he said?

"This is the position, Mr. Forsyte. I can make pretty certain of her

life if I operate, but the baby will be born dead. If I don't operate,

the baby will most probably be born alive, but it's a great risk for

the mother--a great risk. In either case I don't think she can ever have

another child. In her state she obviously can't decide for herself, and

we can't wait for her mother. It's for you to make the decision, while

I'm getting what's necessary. I shall be back within the hour."

The decision! What a decision! No time to get a specialist down! No time

for anything!

The sound of wheels died away, but Soames still stood intent; then,

suddenly covering his ears, he walked back to the river. To come before

its time like this, with no chance to foresee anything, not even to get

her mother here! It was for her mother to make that decision, and

she couldn't arrive from Paris till to-night! If only he could have

understood the doctor's jargon, the medical niceties, so as to be sure

he was weighing the chances properly; but they were Greek to him--like

a legal problem to a layman. And yet he must decide! He brought his hand

away from his brow wet, though the air was chilly. These sounds which

came from her room! To go back there would only make it more difficult.

He must be calm, clear. On the one hand life, nearly certain, of his

young wife, death quite certain, of his child; and--no more children

afterwards! On the other, death perhaps of his wife, nearly certain life

for the child; and--no more children afterwards! Which to choose?....

It had rained this last fortnight--the river was very full, and in

the water, collected round the little house-boat moored by his

landing-stage, were many leaves from the woods above, brought off by a

frost. Leaves fell, lives drifted down--Death! To decide about death!

And no one to give him a hand. Life lost was lost for good. Let nothing

go that you could keep; for, if it went, you couldn't get it back. It

left you bare, like those trees when they lost their leaves; barer and

barer until you, too, withered and came down. And, by a queer somersault

of thought, he seemed to see not Annette lying up there behind that

window-pane on which the sun was shining, but Irene lying in their

bedroom in Montpellier Square, as it might conceivably have been her

fate to lie, sixteen years ago. Would he have hesitated then? Not a

moment! Operate, operate! Make certain of her life! No decision--a mere

instinctive cry for help, in spite of his knowledge, even then, that she

did not love him! But this! Ah! there was nothing overmastering in his

feeling for Annette! Many times these last months, especially since she

had been growing frightened, he had wondered. She had a will of her

own, was selfish in her French way. And yet--so pretty! What would she

wish--to take the risk. 'I know she wants the child,' he thought. 'If

it's born dead, and no more chance afterwards--it'll upset her terribly.

No more chance! All for nothing! Married life with her for years and

years without a child. Nothing to steady her! She's too young. Nothing

to look forward to, for her--for me! For me!' He struck his hands

against his chest! Why couldn't he think without bringing himself

in--get out of himself and see what he ought to do? The thought hurt

him, then lost edge, as if it had come in contact with a breastplate.

Out of oneself! Impossible! Out into soundless, scentless, touchless,

sightless space! The very idea was ghastly, futile! And touching there

the bedrock of reality, the bottom of his Forsyte spirit, Soames rested

for a moment. When one ceased, all ceased; it might go on, but there'd

be nothing in it!

He looked at his watch. In half an hour the doctor would be back. He

must decide! If against the operation and she died, how face her mother

and the doctor afterwards? How face his own conscience? It was his child

that she was having. If for the operation--then he condemned them both

to childlessness. And for what else had he married her but to have a

lawful heir? And his father--at death's door, waiting for the news!

'It's cruel!' he thought; 'I ought never to have such a thing to settle!

It's cruel!' He turned towards the house. Some deep, simple way of

deciding! He took out a coin, and put it back. If he spun it, he knew he

would not abide by what came up! He went into the dining-room, furthest

away from that room whence the sounds issued. The doctor had said there

was a chance. In here that chance seemed greater; the river did not

flow, nor the leaves fall. A fire was burning. Soames unlocked the

tantalus. He hardly ever touched spirits, but now--he poured himself

out some whisky and drank it neat, craving a faster flow of blood. 'That

fellow Jolyon,' he thought; 'he had children already. He has the woman I

really loved; and now a son by her! And I--I'm asked to destroy my only

child! Annette can't die; it's not possible. She's strong!'

He was still standing sullenly at the sideboard when he heard the

doctor's carriage, and went out to him. He had to wait for him to come

downstairs.

"Well, doctor?"

"The situation's the same. Have you decided?"

"Yes," said Soames; "don't operate!"

"Not? You understand--the risk's great?"

In Soames' set face nothing moved but the lips.

"You said there was a chance?"

"A chance, yes; not much of one."

"You say the baby must be born dead if you do?"

"Yes."

"Do you still think that in any case she can't have another?"

"One can't be absolutely sure, but it's most unlikely."

"She's strong," said Soames; "we'll take the risk."

The doctor looked at him very gravely. "It's on your shoulders," he

said; "with my own wife, I couldn't."

Soames' chin jerked up as if someone had hit him.

"Am I of any use up there?" he asked.

"No; keep away."

"I shall be in my picture-gallery, then; you know where."

The doctor nodded, and went upstairs.

Soames continued to stand, listening. 'By this time to-morrow,'

he thought, 'I may have her death on my hands.' No! it was

unfair--monstrous, to put it that way! Sullenness dropped on him again,

and he went up to the gallery. He stood at the window. The wind was in

the north; it was cold, clear; very blue sky, heavy ragged white clouds

chasing across; the river blue, too, through the screen of goldening

trees; the woods all rich with colour, glowing, burnished-an early

autumn. If it were his own life, would he be taking that risk? 'But

she'd take the risk of losing me,' he thought, 'sooner than lose her

child! She doesn't really love me!' What could one expect--a girl and

French? The one thing really vital to them both, vital to their marriage

and their futures, was a child! 'I've been through a lot for this,' he

thought, 'I'll hold on--hold on. There's a chance of keeping both--a

chance!' One kept till things were taken--one naturally kept! He began

walking round the gallery. He had made one purchase lately which he knew

was a fortune in itself, and he halted before it--a girl with dull gold

hair which looked like filaments of metal gazing at a little golden

monster she was holding in her hand. Even at this tortured moment

he could just feel the extraordinary nature of the bargain he had

made--admire the quality of the table, the floor, the chair, the girl's

figure, the absorbed expression on her face, the dull gold filaments of

her hair, the bright gold of the little monster. Collecting pictures;

growing richer, richer! What use, if...! He turned his back abruptly on

the picture, and went to the window. Some of his doves had flown up from

their perches round the dovecot, and were stretching their wings in the

wind. In the clear sharp sunlight their whiteness almost flashed. They

flew far, making a flung-up hieroglyphic against the sky. Annette fed

the doves; it was pretty to see her. They took it out of her hand; they

knew she was matter-of-fact. A choking sensation came into his throat.

She would not--could not die! She was too--too sensible; and she was

strong, really strong, like her mother, in spite of her fair prettiness.

It was already growing dark when at last he opened the door, and stood

listening. Not a sound! A milky twilight crept about the stairway and

the landings below. He had turned back when a sound caught his ear.

Peering down, he saw a black shape moving, and his heart stood still.

What was it? Death? The shape of Death coming from her door? No! only a

maid without cap or apron. She came to the foot of his flight of stairs

and said breathlessly:

"The doctor wants to see you, sir."

He ran down. She stood flat against the wall to let him pass, and said:

"Oh, Sir! it's over."

"Over?" said Soames, with a sort of menace; "what d'you mean?"

"It's born, sir."

He dashed up the four steps in front of him, and came suddenly on the

doctor in the dim passage. The man was wiping his brow.

"Well?" he said; "quick!"

"Both living; it's all right, I think."

Soames stood quite still, covering his eyes.

"I congratulate you," he heard the doctor say; "it was touch and go."

Soames let fall the hand which was covering his face.

"Thanks," he said; "thanks very much. What is it?"

"Daughter--luckily; a son would have killed her--the head."

A daughter!

"The utmost care of both," he hears the doctor say, "and we shall do.

When does the mother come?"

"To-night, between nine and ten, I hope."

"I'll stay till then. Do you want to see them?"

"Not now," said Soames; "before you go. I'll have dinner sent up to

you." And he went downstairs.

Relief unspeakable, and yet--a daughter! It seemed to him unfair.

To have taken that risk--to have been through this agony--and what

agony!--for a daughter! He stood before the blazing fire of wood logs in

the hall, touching it with his toe and trying to readjust himself. 'My

father!' he thought. A bitter disappointment, no disguising it! One

never got all one wanted in this life! And there was no other--at least,

if there was, it was no use!

While he was standing there, a telegram was brought him.

"Come up at once, your father sinking fast.--MOTHER."

He read it with a choking sensation. One would have thought he couldn't

feel anything after these last hours, but he felt this. Half-past seven,

a train from Reading at nine, and madame's train, if she had caught it,

came in at eight-forty--he would meet that, and go on. He ordered the

carriage, ate some dinner mechanically, and went upstairs. The doctor

came out to him.

"They're sleeping."

"I won't go in," said Soames with relief. "My father's dying; I have

to--go up. Is it all right?"

The doctor's face expressed a kind of doubting admiration. 'If they were

all as unemotional' he might have been saying.

"Yes, I think you may go with an easy mind. You'll be down soon?"

"To-morrow," said Soames. "Here's the address."

The doctor seemed to hover on the verge of sympathy.

"Good-night!" said Soames abruptly, and turned away. He put on his fur

coat. Death! It was a chilly business. He smoked a cigarette in the

carriage--one of his rare cigarettes. The night was windy and flew on

black wings; the carriage lights had to search out the way. His father!

That old, old man! A comfortless night--to die!

The London train came in just as he reached the station, and Madame

Lamotte, substantial, dark-clothed, very yellow in the lamplight, came

towards the exit with a dressing-bag.

"This all you have?" asked Soames.

"But yes; I had not the time. How is my little one?"

"Doing well--both. A girl!"

"A girl! What joy! I had a frightful crossing!"

Her black bulk, solid, unreduced by the frightful crossing, climbed into

the brougham.

"And you, mon cher?"

"My father's dying," said Soames between his teeth. "I'm going up. Give

my love to Annette."

"Tiens!" murmured Madame Lamotte; "quel malheur!"

Soames took his hat off, and moved towards his train. 'The French!' he

thought.

CHAPTER XIII--JAMES IS TOLD

A simple cold, caught in the room with double windows, where the air and

the people who saw him were filtered, as it were, the room he had not

left since the middle of September--and James was in deep waters. A

little cold, passing his little strength and flying quickly to his

lungs. "He mustn't catch cold," the doctor had declared, and he had gone

and caught it. When he first felt it in his throat he had said to his

nurse--for he had one now--"There, I knew how it would be, airing the

room like that!" For a whole day he was highly nervous about himself and

went in advance of all precautions and remedies; drawing every breath

with extreme care and having his temperature taken every hour. Emily was

not alarmed.

But next morning when she went in the nurse whispered: "He won't have

his temperature taken."

Emily crossed to the side of the bed where he was lying, and said

softly, "How do you feel, James?" holding the thermometer to his lips.

James looked up at her.

"What's the good of that?" he murmured huskily; "I don't want to know."

Then she was alarmed. He breathed with difficulty, he looked terribly

frail, white, with faint red discolorations. She had 'had trouble' with

him, Goodness knew; but he was James, had been James for nearly fifty

years; she couldn't remember or imagine life without James--James,

behind all his fussiness, his pessimism, his crusty shell, deeply

affectionate, really kind and generous to them all!

All that day and the next he hardly uttered a word, but there was in

his eyes a noticing of everything done for him, a look on his face which

told her he was fighting; and she did not lose hope. His very stillness,

the way he conserved every little scrap of energy, showed the tenacity

with which he was fighting. It touched her deeply; and though her face

was composed and comfortable in the sick-room, tears ran down her cheeks

when she was out of it.

About tea-time on the third day--she had just changed her dress,

keeping her appearance so as not to alarm him, because he noticed

everything--she saw a difference. 'It's no use; I'm tired,' was

written plainly across that white face, and when she went up to him, he

muttered: "Send for Soames."

"Yes, James," she said comfortably; "all right--at once." And she kissed

his forehead. A tear dropped there, and as she wiped it off she saw that

his eyes looked grateful. Much upset, and without hope now, she sent

Soames the telegram.

When he entered out of the black windy night, the big house was still as

a grave. Warmson's broad face looked almost narrow; he took the fur coat

with a sort of added care, saying:

"Will you have a glass of wine, sir?"

Soames shook his head, and his eyebrows made enquiry.

Warmson's lips twitched. "He's asking for you, sir;" and suddenly he

blew his nose. "It's a long time, sir," he said, "that I've been with

Mr. Forsyte--a long time."

Soames left him folding the coat, and began to mount the stairs. This

house, where he had been born and sheltered, had never seemed to him so

warm, and rich, and cosy, as during this last pilgrimage to his father's

room. It was not his taste; but in its own substantial, lincrusta way

it was the acme of comfort and security. And the night was so dark and

windy; the grave so cold and lonely!

He paused outside the door. No sound came from within. He turned the

handle softly and was in the room before he was perceived. The light was

shaded. His mother and Winifred were sitting on the far side of the bed;

the nurse was moving away from the near side where was an empty chair.

'For me!' thought Soames. As he moved from the door his mother and

sister rose, but he signed with his hand and they sat down again. He

went up to the chair and stood looking at his father. James' breathing

was as if strangled; his eyes were closed. And in Soames, looking on

his father so worn and white and wasted, listening to his strangled

breathing, there rose a passionate vehemence of anger against Nature,

cruel, inexorable Nature, kneeling on the chest of that wisp of a body,

slowly pressing out the breath, pressing out the life of the being who

was dearest to him in the world. His father, of all men, had lived a

careful life, moderate, abstemious, and this was his reward--to have

life slowly, painfully squeezed out of him! And, without knowing that he

spoke, he said: "It's cruel!"

He saw his mother cover her eyes and Winifred bow her face towards the

bed. Women! They put up with things so much better than men. He took a

step nearer to his father. For three days James had not been shaved,

and his lips and chin were covered with hair, hardly more snowy than his

forehead. It softened his face, gave it a queer look already not of this

world. His eyes opened. Soames went quite close and bent over. The lips

moved.

"Here I am, Father:"

"Um--what--what news? They never tell...." the voice died, and a flood

of emotion made Soames' face work so that he could not speak. Tell

him?--yes. But what? He made a great effort, got his lips together, and

said:

"Good news, dear, good--Annette, a son."

"Ah!" It was the queerest sound, ugly, relieved, pitiful,

triumphant--like the noise a baby makes getting what it wants. The

eyes closed, and that strangled sound of breathing began again. Soames

recoiled to the chair and stonily sat down. The lie he had told, based,

as it were, on some deep, temperamental instinct that after death James

would not know the truth, had taken away all power of feeling for the

moment. His arm brushed against something. It was his father's naked

foot. In the struggle to breathe he had pushed it out from under the

clothes. Soames took it in his hand, a cold foot, light and thin, white,

very cold. What use to put it back, to wrap up that which must be colder

soon! He warmed it mechanically with his hand, listening to his father's

laboured breathing; while the power of feeling rose again within him.

A little sob, quickly smothered, came from Winifred, but his mother sat

unmoving with her eyes fixed on James. Soames signed to the nurse.

"Where's the doctor?" he whispered.

"He's been sent for."

"Can't you do anything to ease his breathing?"

"Only an injection; and he can't stand it. The doctor said, while he was

fighting...."

"He's not fighting," whispered Soames, "he's being slowly smothered.

It's awful."

James stirred uneasily, as if he knew what they were saying. Soames rose

and bent over him. James feebly moved his two hands, and Soames took

them.

"He wants to be pulled up," whispered the nurse.

Soames pulled. He thought he pulled gently, but a look almost of anger

passed over James' face. The nurse plumped the pillows. Soames laid the

hands down, and bending over kissed his father's forehead. As he was

raising himself again, James' eyes bent on him a look which seemed to

come from the very depths of what was left within. 'I'm done, my boy,'

it seemed to say, 'take care of them, take care of yourself; take

care--I leave it all to you.'

"Yes, Yes," Soames whispered, "yes, yes."

Behind him the nurse did he knew, not what, for his father made a tiny

movement of repulsion as if resenting that interference; and almost

at once his breathing eased away, became quiet; he lay very still. The

strained expression on his face passed, a curious white tranquillity

took its place. His eyelids quivered, rested; the whole face rested; at

ease. Only by the faint puffing of his lips could they tell that he was

breathing. Soames sank back on his chair, and fell to cherishing the

foot again. He heard the nurse quietly crying over there by the fire;

curious that she, a stranger, should be the only one of them who cried!

He heard the quiet lick and flutter of the fire flames. One more old

Forsyte going to his long rest--wonderful, they were!--wonderful how he

had held on! His mother and Winifred were leaning forward, hanging

on the sight of James' lips. But Soames bent sideways over the feet,

warming them both; they gave him comfort, colder and colder though they

grew. Suddenly he started up; a sound, a dreadful sound such as he had

never heard, was coming from his father's lips, as if an outraged heart

had broken with a long moan. What a strong heart, to have uttered that

farewell! It ceased. Soames looked into the face. No motion; no breath!

Dead! He kissed the brow, turned round and went out of the room. He

ran upstairs to the bedroom, his old bedroom, still kept for him; flung

himself face down on the bed, and broke into sobs which he stilled with

the pillow....

A little later he went downstairs and passed into the room. James lay

alone, wonderfully calm, free from shadow and anxiety, with the gravity

on his ravaged face which underlies great age, the worn fine gravity of

old coins.

Soames looked steadily at that face, at the fire, at all the room with

windows thrown open to the London night.

"Good-bye!" he whispered, and went out.

CHAPTER XIV--HIS

He had much to see to, that night and all next day. A telegram at

breakfast reassured him about Annette, and he only caught the last train

back to Reading, with Emily's kiss on his forehead and in his ears her

words:

"I don't know what I should have done without you, my dear boy."

He reached his house at midnight. The weather had changed, was mild

again, as though, having finished its work and sent a Forsyte to

his last account, it could relax. A second telegram, received at

dinner-time, had confirmed the good news of Annette, and, instead of

going in, Soames passed down through the garden in the moonlight to his

houseboat. He could sleep there quite well. Bitterly tired, he lay down

on the sofa in his fur coat and fell asleep. He woke soon after dawn and

went on deck. He stood against the rail, looking west where the river

swept round in a wide curve under the woods. In Soames, appreciation of

natural beauty was curiously like that of his farmer ancestors, a sense

of grievance if it wasn't there, sharpened, no doubt, and civilised, by

his researches among landscape painting. But dawn has power to fertilise

the most matter-of-fact vision, and he was stirred. It was another world

from the river he knew, under that remote cool light; a world into which

man had not entered, an unreal world, like some strange shore sighted

by discovery. Its colour was not the colour of convention, was hardly

colour at all; its shapes were brooding yet distinct; its silence

stunning; it had no scent. Why it should move him he could not tell,

unless it were that he felt so alone in it, bare of all relationship and

all possessions. Into such a world his father might be voyaging, for all

resemblance it had to the world he had left. And Soames took refuge from

it in wondering what painter could have done it justice. The white-grey

water was like--like the belly of a fish! Was it possible that this

world on which he looked was all private property, except the water--and

even that was tapped! No tree, no shrub, not a blade of grass, not a

bird or beast, not even a fish that was not owned. And once on a time

all this was jungle and marsh and water, and weird creatures roamed and

sported without human cognizance to give them names; rotting luxuriance

had rioted where those tall, carefully planted woods came down to the

water, and marsh-misted reeds on that far side had covered all the

pasture. Well! they had got it under, kennelled it all up, labelled it,

and stowed it in lawyers' offices. And a good thing too! But once in

a way, as now, the ghost of the past came out to haunt and brood

and whisper to any human who chanced to be awake: 'Out of my unowned

loneliness you all came, into it some day you will all return.'

And Soames, who felt the chill and the eeriness of that world-new to

him and so very old: the world, unowned, visiting the scene of its

past--went down and made himself tea on a spirit-lamp. When he had drunk

it, he took out writing materials and wrote two paragraphs:

"On the 20th instant at his residence in Park Lane, James Forsyte,

in his ninety-first year. Funeral at noon on the 24th at Highgate. No

flowers by request."

"On the 20th instant at The Shelter; Mapledurham, Annette, wife of

Soames Forsyte, of a daughter." And underneath on the blottingpaper he

traced the word "son."

It was eight o'clock in an ordinary autumn world when he went across to

the house. Bushes across the river stood round and bright-coloured out

of a milky haze; the wood-smoke went up blue and straight; and his doves

cooed, preening their feathers in the sunlight.

He stole up to his dressing-room, bathed, shaved, put on fresh linen and

dark clothes.

Madame Lamotte was beginning her breakfast when he went down.

She looked at his clothes, said, "Don't tell me!" and pressed his hand.

"Annette is prettee well. But the doctor say she can never have no more

children. You knew that?" Soames nodded. "It's a pity. Mais la petite

est adorable. Du cafe?"

Soames got away from her as soon as he could. She offended him--solid,

matter-of-fact, quick, clear--French. He could not bear her vowels,

her 'r's'; he resented the way she had looked at him, as if it were

his fault that Annette could never bear him a son! His fault! He even

resented her cheap adoration of the daughter he had not yet seen.

Curious how he jibbed away from sight of his wife and child!

One would have thought he must have rushed up at the first moment. On

the contrary, he had a sort of physical shrinking from it--fastidious

possessor that he was. He was afraid of what Annette was thinking of

him, author of her agonies, afraid of the look of the baby, afraid of

showing his disappointment with the present and--the future.

He spent an hour walking up and down the drawing-room before he could

screw his courage up to mount the stairs and knock on the door of their

room.

Madame Lamotte opened it.

"Ah! At last you come! Elle vous attend!" She passed him, and Soames

went in with his noiseless step, his jaw firmly set, his eyes furtive.

Annette was very pale and very pretty lying there. The baby was hidden

away somewhere; he could not see it. He went up to the bed, and with

sudden emotion bent and kissed her forehead.

"Here you are then, Soames," she said. "I am not so bad now. But I

suffered terribly, terribly. I am glad I cannot have any more. Oh! how I

suffered!"

Soames stood silent, stroking her hand; words of endearment, of

sympathy, absolutely would not come; the thought passed through him:

'An English girl wouldn't have said that!' At this moment he knew with

certainty that he would never be near to her in spirit and in truth, nor

she to him. He had collected her--that was all! And Jolyon's words came

rushing into his mind: "I should imagine you will be glad to have your

neck out of chancery." Well, he had got it out! Had he got it in again?

"We must feed you up," he said, "you'll soon be strong."

"Don't you want to see baby, Soames? She is asleep."

"Of course," said Soames, "very much."

He passed round the foot of the bed to the other side and stood staring.

For the first moment what he saw was much what he had expected to see--a

baby. But as he stared and the baby breathed and made little sleeping

movements with its tiny features, it seemed to assume an individual

shape, grew to be like a picture, a thing he would know again; not

repulsive, strangely bud-like and touching. It had dark hair. He touched

it with his finger, he wanted to see its eyes. They opened, they were

dark--whether blue or brown he could not tell. The eyes winked, stared,

they had a sort of sleepy depth in them. And suddenly his heart felt

queer, warm, as if elated.

"Ma petite fleur!" Annette said softly.

"Fleur," repeated Soames: "Fleur! we'll call her that."

The sense of triumph and renewed possession swelled within him.

By God! this--this thing was his! By God! this--this thing was his!

THE FORSYTE SAGA--VOLUME III.

AWAKENING and TO LET

By John Galsworthy

AWAKENING

TO CHARLES SCRIBNER

AWAKENING

Through the massive skylight illuminating the hall at Robin Hill, the

July sunlight at five o'clock fell just where the broad stairway turned;

and in that radiant streak little Jon Forsyte stood, blue-linen-suited.

His hair was shining, and his eyes, from beneath a frown, for he was

considering how to go downstairs, this last of innumerable times, before

the car brought his father and mother home. Four at a time, and five

at the bottom? Stale! Down the banisters? But in which fashion? On his

face, feet foremost? Very stale. On his stomach, sideways? Paltry! On

his back, with his arms stretched down on both sides? Forbidden! Or on

his face, head foremost, in a manner unknown as yet to any but himself?

Such was the cause of the frown on the illuminated face of little

Jon....

In that Summer of 1909 the simple souls who even then desired to

simplify the English tongue, had, of course, no cognizance of little

Jon, or they would have claimed him for a disciple. But one can be too

simple in this life, for his real name was Jolyon, and his living father

and dead half-brother had usurped of old the other shortenings, Jo and

Jolly. As a fact little Jon had done his best to conform to convention

and spell himself first Jhon, then John; not till his father had

explained the sheer necessity, had he spelled his name Jon.

Up till now that father had possessed what was left of his heart by the

groom, Bob, who played the concertina, and his nurse "Da," who wore

the violet dress on Sundays, and enjoyed the name of Spraggins in that

private life lived at odd moments even by domestic servants. His mother

had only appeared to him, as it were in dreams, smelling delicious,

smoothing his forehead just before he fell asleep, and sometimes docking

his hair, of a golden brown colour. When he cut his head open against

the nursery fender she was there to be bled over; and when he had

nightmare she would sit on his bed and cuddle his head against her neck.

She was precious but remote, because "Da" was so near, and there is

hardly room for more than one woman at a time in a man's heart. With his

father, too, of course, he had special bonds of union; for little

Jon also meant to be a painter when he grew up--with the one small

difference, that his father painted pictures, and little Jon intended to

paint ceilings and walls, standing on a board between two step-ladders,

in a dirty-white apron, and a lovely smell of whitewash. His father also

took him riding in Richmond Park, on his pony, Mouse, so-called because

it was so-coloured.

Little Jon had been born with a silver spoon in a mouth which was rather

curly and large. He had never heard his father or his mother speak in an

angry voice, either to each other, himself, or anybody else; the groom,

Bob, Cook, Jane, Bella and the other servants, even "Da," who alone

restrained him in his courses, had special voices when they talked to

him. He was therefore of opinion that the world was a place of perfect

and perpetual gentility and freedom.

A child of 1901, he had come to consciousness when his country, just

over that bad attack of scarlet fever, the Boer War, was preparing for

the Liberal revival of 1906. Coercion was unpopular, parents had exalted

notions of giving their offspring a good time. They spoiled their rods,

spared their children, and anticipated the results with enthusiasm. In

choosing, moreover, for his father an amiable man of fifty-two, who had

already lost an only son, and for his mother a woman of thirty-eight,

whose first and only child he was, little Jon had done well and wisely.

What had saved him from becoming a cross between a lap dog and a little

prig, had been his father's adoration of his mother, for even little Jon

could see that she was not merely just his mother, and that he played

second fiddle to her in his father's heart: What he played in his

mother's heart he knew not yet. As for "Auntie" June, his half-sister

(but so old that she had grown out of the relationship) she loved him,

of course, but was too sudden. His devoted "Da," too, had a Spartan

touch. His bath was cold and his knees were bare; he was not encouraged

to be sorry for himself. As to the vexed question of his education,

little Jon shared the theory of those who considered that children

should not be forced. He rather liked the Mademoiselle who came for two

hours every morning to teach him her language, together with history,

geography and sums; nor were the piano lessons which his mother gave him

disagreeable, for she had a way of luring him from tune to tune, never

making him practise one which did not give him pleasure, so that he

remained eager to convert ten thumbs into eight fingers. Under his

father he learned to draw pleasure-pigs and other animals. He was not a

highly educated little boy. Yet, on the whole, the silver spoon stayed

in his mouth without spoiling it, though "Da" sometimes said that other

children would do him a "world of good."

It was a disillusionment, then, when at the age of nearly seven she held

him down on his back, because he wanted to do something of which she did

not approve. This first interference with the free individualism of a

Forsyte drove him almost frantic. There was something appalling in the

utter helplessness of that position, and the uncertainty as to whether

it would ever come to an end. Suppose she never let him get up any more!

He suffered torture at the top of his voice for fifty seconds. Worse

than anything was his perception that "Da" had taken all that time

to realise the agony of fear he was enduring. Thus, dreadfully, was

revealed to him the lack of imagination in the human being.

When he was let up he remained convinced that "Da" had done a dreadful

thing. Though he did not wish to bear witness against her, he had been

compelled, by fear of repetition, to seek his mother and say: "Mum,

don't let 'Da' hold me down on my back again."

His mother, her hands held up over her head, and in them two plaits of

hair--"couleur de feuille morte," as little Jon had not yet learned

to call it--had looked at him with eyes like little bits of his brown

velvet tunic, and answered:

"No, darling, I won't."

She, being in the nature of a goddess, little Jon was satisfied;

especially when, from under the dining-table at breakfast, where he

happened to be waiting for a mushroom, he had overheard her say to his

father:

"Then, will you tell 'Da,' dear, or shall I? She's so devoted to him";

and his father's answer:

"Well, she mustn't show it that way. I know exactly what it feels like

to be held down on one's back. No Forsyte can stand it for a minute."

Conscious that they did not know him to be under the table, little Jon

was visited by the quite new feeling of embarrassment, and stayed where

he was, ravaged by desire for the mushroom.

Such had been his first dip into the dark abysses of existence. Nothing

much had been revealed to him after that, till one day, having gone down

to the cow-house for his drink of milk fresh from the cow, after Garratt

had finished milking, he had seen Clover's calf, dead. Inconsolable,

and followed by an upset Garratt, he had sought "Da"; but suddenly

aware that she was not the person he wanted, had rushed away to find his

father, and had run into the arms of his mother.

"Clover's calf's dead! Oh! Oh! It looked so soft!"

His mother's clasp, and her:

"Yes, darling, there, there!" had stayed his sobbing. But if Clover's

calf could die, anything could--not only bees, flies, beetles and

chickens--and look soft like that! This was appalling--and soon

forgotten!

The next thing had been to sit on a bumble bee, a poignant experience,

which his mother had understood much better than "Da"; and nothing of

vital importance had happened after that till the year turned; when,

following a day of utter wretchedness, he had enjoyed a disease composed

of little spots, bed, honey in a spoon, and many Tangerine oranges.

It was then that the world had flowered. To "Auntie" June he owed that

flowering, for no sooner was he a little lame duck than she came rushing

down from London, bringing with her the books which had nurtured her

own Berserker spirit, born in the noted year of 1869. Aged, and of many

colours, they were stored with the most formidable happenings. Of

these she read to little Jon, till he was allowed to read to himself;

whereupon she whisked back to London and left them with him in a heap.

Those books cooked his fancy, till he thought and dreamed of nothing but

midshipmen and dhows, pirates, rafts, sandal-wood traders, iron horses,

sharks, battles, Tartars, Red Indians, balloons, North Poles and other

extravagant delights. The moment he was suffered to get up, he rigged

his bed fore and aft, and set out from it in a narrow bath across green

seas of carpet, to a rock, which he climbed by means of its mahogany

drawer knobs, to sweep the horizon with his drinking tumbler screwed to

his eye, in search of rescuing sails. He made a daily raft out of the

towel stand, the tea tray, and his pillows. He saved the juice from his

French plums, bottled it in an empty medicine bottle, and provisioned

the raft with the rum that it became; also with pemmican made out of

little saved-up bits of chicken sat on and dried at the fire; and with

lime juice against scurvy, extracted from the peel of his oranges and a

little economised juice. He made a North Pole one morning from the whole

of his bedclothes except the bolster, and reached it in a birch-bark

canoe (in private life the fender), after a terrible encounter with a

polar bear fashioned from the bolster and four skittles dressed up

in "Da's" nightgown. After that, his father, seeking to steady his

imagination, brought him Ivanhoe, Bevis, a book about King Arthur, and

Tom Brown's Schooldays. He read the first, and for three days built,

defended and stormed Front de Boeuf's castle, taking every part in the

piece except those of Rebecca and Rowena; with piercing cries of: "En

avant, de Bracy!" and similar utterances. After reading the book about

King Arthur he became almost exclusively Sir Lamorac de Galis, because,

though there was very little about him, he preferred his name to that of

any other knight; and he rode his old rocking-horse to death, armed

with a long bamboo. Bevis he found tame; besides, it required woods and

animals, of which he had none in his nursery, except his two cats, Fitz

and Puck Forsyte, who permitted no liberties. For Tom Brown he was as

yet too young. There was relief in the house when, after the fourth

week, he was permitted to go down and out.

The month being March the trees were exceptionally like the masts of

ships, and for little Jon that was a wonderful Spring, extremely hard

on his knees, suits, and the patience of "Da," who had the washing and

reparation of his clothes. Every morning the moment his breakfast was

over, he could be viewed by his mother and father, whose windows looked

out that way, coming from the study, crossing the terrace, climbing the

old oak tree, his face resolute and his hair bright. He began the day

thus because there was not time to go far afield before his lessons. The

old tree's variety never staled; it had mainmast, foremast, top-gallant

mast, and he could always come down by the halyards--or ropes of the

swing. After his lessons, completed by eleven, he would go to

the kitchen for a thin piece of cheese, a biscuit and two French

plums--provision enough for a jolly-boat at least--and eat it in some

imaginative way; then, armed to the teeth with gun, pistols, and sword,

he would begin the serious climbing of the morning, encountering by the

way innumerable slavers, Indians, pirates, leopards, and bears. He was

seldom seen at that hour of the day without a cutlass in his teeth (like

Dick Needham) amid the rapid explosion of copper caps. And many were the

gardeners he brought down with yellow peas shot out of his little gun.

He lived a life of the most violent action.

"Jon," said his father to his mother, under the oak tree, "is terrible.

I'm afraid he's going to turn out a sailor, or something hopeless. Do

you see any sign of his appreciating beauty?"

"Not the faintest."

"Well, thank heaven he's no turn for wheels or engines! I can bear

anything but that. But I wish he'd take more interest in Nature."

"He's imaginative, Jolyon."

"Yes, in a sanguinary way. Does he love anyone just now?"

"No; only everyone. There never was anyone born more loving or more

lovable than Jon."

"Being your boy, Irene."

At this moment little Jon, lying along a branch high above them, brought

them down with two peas; but that fragment of talk lodged, thick, in his

small gizzard. Loving, lovable, imaginative, sanguinary!

The leaves also were thick by now, and it was time for his birthday,

which, occurring every year on the twelfth of May, was always memorable

for his chosen dinner of sweetbread, mushrooms, macaroons, and ginger

beer.

Between that eighth birthday, however, and the afternoon when he stood

in the July radiance at the turning of the stairway, several important

things had happened.

"Da," worn out by washing his knees, or moved by that mysterious

instinct which forces even nurses to desert their nurslings, left the

very day after his birthday in floods of tears "to be married"--of

all things--"to a man." Little Jon, from whom it had been kept, was

inconsolable for an afternoon. It ought not to have been kept from him!

Two large boxes of soldiers and some artillery, together with The Young

Buglers, which had been among his birthday presents, cooperated with

his grief in a sort of conversion, and instead of seeking adventures in

person and risking his own life, he began to play imaginative games, in

which he risked the lives of countless tin soldiers, marbles, stones and

beans. Of these forms of "chair a canon" he made collections, and, using

them alternately, fought the Peninsular, the Seven Years, the Thirty

Years, and other wars, about which he had been reading of late in a big

History of Europe which had been his grandfather's. He altered them to

suit his genius, and fought them all over the floor in his day nursery,

so that nobody could come in, for fearing of disturbing Gustavus

Adolphus, King of Sweden, or treading on an army of Austrians. Because

of the sound of the word he was passionately addicted to the Austrians,

and finding there were so few battles in which they were successful

he had to invent them in his games. His favourite generals were

Prince Eugene, the Archduke Charles and Wallenstein. Tilly and Mack

("music-hall turns" he heard his father call them one day, whatever that

might mean) one really could not love very much, Austrian though they

were. For euphonic reasons, too, he doted on Turenne.

This phase, which caused his parents anxiety, because it kept him

indoors when he ought to have been out, lasted through May and half of

June, till his father killed it by bringing home to him Tom Sawyer and

Huckleberry Finn. When he read those books something happened in him,

and he went out of doors again in passionate quest of a river. There

being none on the premises at Robin Hill, he had to make one out of

the pond, which fortunately had water lilies, dragonflies, gnats,

bullrushes, and three small willow trees. On this pond, after his father

and Garratt had ascertained by sounding that it had a reliable bottom

and was nowhere more than two feet deep, he was allowed a little

collapsible canoe, in which he spent hours and hours paddling, and lying

down out of sight of Indian Joe and other enemies. On the shore of the

pond, too, he built himself a wigwam about four feet square, of old

biscuit tins, roofed in by boughs. In this he would make little fires,

and cook the birds he had not shot with his gun, hunting in the coppice

and fields, or the fish he did not catch in the pond because there were

none. This occupied the rest of June and that July, when his father

and mother were away in Ireland. He led a lonely life of "make believe"

during those five weeks of summer weather, with gun, wigwam, water and

canoe; and, however hard his active little brain tried to keep the

sense of beauty away, she did creep in on him for a second now and then,

perching on the wing of a dragon-fly, glistening on the water lilies, or

brushing his eyes with her blue as he lay on his back in ambush.

"Auntie" June, who had been left in charge, had a "grown-up" in the

house, with a cough and a large piece of putty which he was making

into a face; so she hardly ever came down to see him in the pond. Once,

however, she brought with her two other "grown-ups." Little Jon, who

happened to have painted his naked self bright blue and yellow in

stripes out of his father's water-colour box, and put some duck's

feathers in his hair, saw them coming, and--ambushed himself among the

willows. As he had foreseen, they came at once to his wigwam and knelt

down to look inside, so that with a blood-curdling yell he was able to

take the scalps of "Auntie" June and the woman "grown-up" in an almost

complete manner before they kissed him. The names of the two grown-ups

were "Auntie" Holly and "Uncle" Val, who had a brown face and a little

limp, and laughed at him terribly. He took a fancy to "Auntie" Holly,

who seemed to be a sister too; but they both went away the same

afternoon and he did not see them again. Three days before his father

and mother were to come home "Auntie" June also went off in a great

hurry, taking the "grown-up" who coughed and his piece of putty; and

Mademoiselle said: "Poor man, he was veree ill. I forbid you to go into

his room, Jon." Little Jon, who rarely did things merely because he was

told not to, refrained from going, though he was bored and lonely. In

truth the day of the pond was past, and he was filled to the brim of

his soul with restlessness and the want of something--not a tree, not a

gun--something soft. Those last two days had seemed months in spite

of Cast Up by the Sea, wherein he was reading about Mother Lee and her

terrible wrecking bonfire. He had gone up and down the stairs perhaps a

hundred times in those two days, and often from the day nursery, where

he slept now, had stolen into his mother's room, looked at everything,

without touching, and on into the dressing-room; and standing on one leg

beside the bath, like Slingsby, had whispered:

"Ho, ho, ho! Dog my cats!" mysteriously, to bring luck. Then, stealing

back, he had opened his mother's wardrobe, and taken a long sniff which

seemed to bring him nearer to--he didn't know what.

He had done this just before he stood in the streak of sunlight,

debating in which of the several ways he should slide down the

banisters. They all seemed silly, and in a sudden languor he began

descending the steps one by one. During that descent he could remember

his father quite distinctly--the short grey beard, the deep eyes

twinkling, the furrow between them, the funny smile, the thin figure

which always seemed so tall to little Jon; but his mother he couldn't

see. All that represented her was something swaying with two dark eyes

looking back at him; and the scent of her wardrobe.

Bella was in the hall, drawing aside the big curtains, and opening the

front door. Little Jon said, wheedling,

"Bella!"

"Yes, Master Jon."

"Do let's have tea under the oak tree when they come; I know they'd like

it best."

"You mean you'd like it best."

Little Jon considered.

"No, they would, to please me."

Bella smiled. "Very well, I'll take it out if you'll stay quiet here and

not get into mischief before they come."

Little Jon sat down on the bottom step, and nodded. Bella came close,

and looked him over.

"Get up!" she said.

Little Jon got up. She scrutinized him behind; he was not green, and his

knees seemed clean.

"All right!" she said. "My! Aren't you brown? Give me a kiss!"

And little Jon received a peck on his hair.

"What jam?" he asked. "I'm so tired of waiting."

"Gooseberry and strawberry."

Num! They were his favourites!

When she was gone he sat still for quite a minute. It was quiet in the

big hall open to its East end so that he could see one of his trees,

a brig sailing very slowly across the upper lawn. In the outer hall

shadows were slanting from the pillars. Little Jon got up, jumped one of

them, and walked round the clump of iris plants which filled the pool

of grey-white marble in the centre. The flowers were pretty, but only

smelled a very little. He stood in the open doorway and looked out.

Suppose!--suppose they didn't come! He had waited so long that he

felt he could not bear that, and his attention slid at once from such

finality to the dust motes in the bluish sunlight coming in: Thrusting

his hand up, he tried to catch some. Bella ought to have dusted that

piece of air! But perhaps they weren't dust--only what sunlight was made

of, and he looked to see whether the sunlight out of doors was the same.

It was not. He had said he would stay quiet in the hall, but he simply

couldn't any more; and crossing the gravel of the drive he lay down

on the grass beyond. Pulling six daisies he named them carefully,

Sir Lamorac, Sir Tristram, Sir Lancelot, Sir Palimedes, Sir Bors, Sir

Gawain, and fought them in couples till only Sir Lamorac, whom he had

selected for a specially stout stalk, had his head on, and even he,

after three encounters, looked worn and waggly. A beetle was moving

slowly in the grass, which almost wanted cutting. Every blade was

a small tree, round whose trunk the beetle had to glide. Little Jon

stretched out Sir Lamorac, feet foremost, and stirred the creature up.

It scuttled painfully. Little Jon laughed, lost interest, and sighed.

His heart felt empty. He turned over and lay on his back. There was a

scent of honey from the lime trees in flower, and in the sky the blue

was beautiful, with a few white clouds which looked and perhaps tasted

like lemon ice. He could hear Bob playing: "Way down upon de Suwannee

ribber" on his concertina, and it made him nice and sad. He turned over

again and put his ear to the ground--Indians could hear things coming

ever so far--but he could hear nothing--only the concertina! And almost

instantly he did hear a grinding sound, a faint toot. Yes! it was a

car--coming--coming! Up he jumped. Should he wait in the porch, or rush

upstairs, and as they came in, shout: "Look!" and slide slowly down the

banisters, head foremost? Should he? The car turned in at the drive. It

was too late! And he only waited, jumping up and down in his excitement.

The car came quickly, whirred, and stopped. His father got out, exactly

like life. He bent down and little Jon bobbed up--they bumped. His

father said,

"Bless us! Well, old man, you are brown!" Just as he would; and the

sense of expectation--of something wanted--bubbled unextinguished in

little Jon. Then, with a long, shy look he saw his mother, in a blue

dress, with a blue motor scarf over her cap and hair, smiling. He jumped

as high as ever he could, twined his legs behind her back, and hugged.

He heard her gasp, and felt her hugging back. His eyes, very dark blue

just then, looked into hers, very dark brown, till her lips closed on

his eyebrow, and, squeezing with all his might, he heard her creak and

laugh, and say:

"You are strong, Jon!"

He slid down at that, and rushed into the hall, dragging her by the

hand.

While he was eating his jam beneath the oak tree, he noticed things

about his mother that he had never seemed to see before, her cheeks for

instance were creamy, there were silver threads in her dark goldy hair,

her throat had no knob in it like Bella's, and she went in and out

softly. He noticed, too, some little lines running away from the corners

of her eyes, and a nice darkness under them. She was ever so beautiful,

more beautiful than "Da" or Mademoiselle, or "Auntie" June or even

"Auntie" Holly, to whom he had taken a fancy; even more beautiful than

Bella, who had pink cheeks and came out too suddenly in places. This new

beautifulness of his mother had a kind of particular importance, and he

ate less than he had expected to.

When tea was over his father wanted him to walk round the gardens.

He had a long conversation with his father about things in general,

avoiding his private life--Sir Lamorac, the Austrians, and the emptiness

he had felt these last three days, now so suddenly filled up. His father

told him of a place called Glensofantrim, where he and his mother had

been; and of the little people who came out of the ground there when it

was very quiet. Little Jon came to a halt, with his heels apart.

"Do you really believe they do, Daddy?" "No, Jon, but I thought you

might."

"Why?"

"You're younger than I; and they're fairies." Little Jon squared the

dimple in his chin.

"I don't believe in fairies. I never see any." "Ha!" said his father.

"Does Mum?"

His father smiled his funny smile.

"No; she only sees Pan."

"What's Pan?"

"The Goaty God who skips about in wild and beautiful places."

"Was he in Glensofantrim?"

"Mum said so."

Little Jon took his heels up, and led on.

"Did you see him?"

"No; I only saw Venus Anadyomene."

Little Jon reflected; Venus was in his book about the Greeks and

Trojans. Then Anna was her Christian and Dyomene her surname?

But it appeared, on inquiry, that it was one word, which meant rising

from the foam.

"Did she rise from the foam in Glensofantrim?"

"Yes; every day."

"What is she like, Daddy?"

"Like Mum."

"Oh! Then she must be..." but he stopped at that, rushed at a wall,

scrambled up, and promptly scrambled down again. The discovery that his

mother was beautiful was one which he felt must absolutely be kept to

himself. His father's cigar, however, took so long to smoke, that at

last he was compelled to say:

"I want to see what Mum's brought home. Do you mind, Daddy?"

He pitched the motive low, to absolve him from unmanliness, and was a

little disconcerted when his father looked at him right through, heaved

an important sigh, and answered:

"All right, old man, you go and love her."

He went, with a pretence of slowness, and then rushed, to make up. He

entered her bedroom from his own, the door being open. She was still

kneeling before a trunk, and he stood close to her, quite still.

She knelt up straight, and said:

"Well, Jon?"

"I thought I'd just come and see."

Having given and received another hug, he mounted the window-seat, and

tucking his legs up under him watched her unpack. He derived a pleasure

from the operation such as he had not yet known, partly because she was

taking out things which looked suspicious, and partly because he liked

to look at her. She moved differently from anybody else, especially from

Bella; she was certainly the refinedest-looking person he had ever seen.

She finished the trunk at last, and knelt down in front of him.

"Have you missed us, Jon?"

Little Jon nodded, and having thus admitted his feelings, continued to

nod.

"But you had 'Auntie' June?"

"Oh! she had a man with a cough."

His mother's face changed, and looked almost angry. He added hastily:

"He was a poor man, Mum; he coughed awfully; I--I liked him."

His mother put her hands behind his waist.

"You like everybody, Jon?"

Little Jon considered.

"Up to a point," he said: "Auntie June took me to church one Sunday."

"To church? Oh!"

"She wanted to see how it would affect me." "And did it?"

"Yes. I came over all funny, so she took me home again very quick. I

wasn't sick after all. I went to bed and had hot brandy and water, and

read The Boys of Beechwood. It was scrumptious."

His mother bit her lip.

"When was that?"

"Oh! about--a long time ago--I wanted her to take me again, but she

wouldn't. You and Daddy never go to church, do you?"

"No, we don't."

"Why don't you?"

His mother smiled.

"Well, dear, we both of us went when we were little. Perhaps we went

when we were too little."

"I see," said little Jon, "it's dangerous."

"You shall judge for yourself about all those things as you grow up."

Little Jon replied in a calculating manner:

"I don't want to grow up, much. I don't want to go to school." A sudden

overwhelming desire to say something more, to say what he really felt,

turned him red. "I--I want to stay with you, and be your lover, Mum."

Then with an instinct to improve the situation, he added quickly "I

don't want to go to bed to-night, either. I'm simply tired of going to

bed, every night."

"Have you had any more nightmares?"

"Only about one. May I leave the door open into your room to-night,

Mum?"

"Yes, just a little." Little Jon heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"What did you see in Glensofantrim?"

"Nothing but beauty, darling."

"What exactly is beauty?"

"What exactly is--Oh! Jon, that's a poser."

"Can I see it, for instance?" His mother got up, and sat beside him.

"You do, every day. The sky is beautiful, the stars, and moonlit nights,

and then the birds, the flowers, the trees--they're all beautiful. Look

out of the window--there's beauty for you, Jon."

"Oh! yes, that's the view. Is that all?"

"All? no. The sea is wonderfully beautiful, and the waves, with their

foam flying back."

"Did you rise from it every day, Mum?"

His mother smiled. "Well, we bathed."

Little Jon suddenly reached out and caught her neck in his hands.

"I know," he said mysteriously, "you're it, really, and all the rest is

make-believe."

She sighed, laughed, said: "Oh! Jon!"

Little Jon said critically:

"Do you think Bella beautiful, for instance? I hardly do."

"Bella is young; that's something."

"But you look younger, Mum. If you bump against Bella she hurts."

"I don't believe 'Da' was beautiful, when I come to think of it; and

Mademoiselle's almost ugly."

"Mademoiselle has a very nice face." "Oh! yes; nice. I love your little

rays, Mum."

"Rays?"

Little Jon put his finger to the outer corner of her eye.

"Oh! Those? But they're a sign of age."

"They come when you smile."

"But they usen't to."

"Oh! well, I like them. Do you love me, Mum?"

"I do--I do love you, darling."

"Ever so?"

"Ever so!"

"More than I thought you did?"

"Much--much more."

"Well, so do I; so that makes it even."

Conscious that he had never in his life so given himself away, he felt

a sudden reaction to the manliness of Sir Lamorac, Dick Needham, Huck

Finn, and other heroes.

"Shall I show you a thing or two?" he said; and slipping out of her

arms, he stood on his head. Then, fired by her obvious admiration, he

mounted the bed, and threw himself head foremost from his feet on to

his back, without touching anything with his hands. He did this several

times.

That evening, having inspected what they had brought, he stayed up to

dinner, sitting between them at the little round table they used when

they were alone. He was extremely excited. His mother wore a French-grey

dress, with creamy lace made out of little scriggly roses, round her

neck, which was browner than the lace. He kept looking at her, till at

last his father's funny smile made him suddenly attentive to his slice

of pineapple. It was later than he had ever stayed up, when he went to

bed. His mother went up with him, and he undressed very slowly so as to

keep her there. When at last he had nothing on but his pyjamas, he said:

"Promise you won't go while I say my prayers!"

"I promise."

Kneeling down and plunging his face into the bed, little Jon hurried

up, under his breath, opening one eye now and then, to see her standing

perfectly still with a smile on her face. "Our Father"--so went his last

prayer, "which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Mum, thy Kingdom Mum--on

Earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily Mum and forgive us

our trespasses on earth as it is in heaven and trespass against us, for

thine is the evil the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amum! Look

out!" He sprang, and for a long minute remained in her arms. Once in

bed, he continued to hold her hand.

"You won't shut the door any more than that, will you? Are you going to

be long, Mum?"

"I must go down and play to Daddy."

"Oh! well, I shall hear you."

"I hope not; you must go to sleep."

"I can sleep any night."

"Well, this is just a night like any other."

"Oh! no--it's extra special."

"On extra special nights one always sleeps soundest."

"But if I go to sleep, Mum, I shan't hear you come up."

"Well, when I do, I'll come in and give you a kiss, then if you're awake

you'll know, and if you're not you'll still know you've had one."

Little Jon sighed, "All right!" he said: "I suppose I must put up with

that. Mum?"

"Yes?"

"What was her name that Daddy believes in? Venus Anna Diomedes?"

"Oh! my angel! Anadyomene."

"Yes! but I like my name for you much better."

"What is yours, Jon?"

Little Jon answered shyly:

"Guinevere! it's out of the Round Table--I've only just thought of it,

only of course her hair was down."

His mother's eyes, looking past him, seemed to float.

"You won't forget to come, Mum?"

"Not if you'll go to sleep."

"That's a bargain, then." And little Jon screwed up his eyes.

He felt her lips on his forehead, heard her footsteps; opened his eyes

to see her gliding through the doorway, and, sighing, screwed them up

again.

Then Time began.

For some ten minutes of it he tried loyally to sleep, counting a great

number of thistles in a row, "Da's" old recipe for bringing slumber. He

seemed to have been hours counting. It must, he thought, be nearly time

for her to come up now. He threw the bedclothes back. "I'm hot!" he

said, and his voice sounded funny in the darkness, like someone else's.

Why didn't she come? He sat up. He must look! He got out of bed, went to

the window and pulled the curtain a slice aside. It wasn't dark, but he

couldn't tell whether because of daylight or the moon, which was very

big. It had a funny, wicked face, as if laughing at him, and he did not

want to look at it. Then, remembering that his mother had said moonlit

nights were beautiful, he continued to stare out in a general way. The

trees threw thick shadows, the lawn looked like spilt milk, and a long,

long way he could see; oh! very far; right over the world, and it all

looked different and swimmy. There was a lovely smell, too, in his open

window.

'I wish I had a dove like Noah!' he thought.

"The moony moon was round and bright, It shone and shone and made it

light."

After that rhyme, which came into his head all at once, he became

conscious of music, very soft-lovely! Mum playing! He bethought himself

of a macaroon he had, laid up in his chest of drawers, and, getting it,

came back to the window. He leaned out, now munching, now holding his

jaws to hear the music better. "Da" used to say that angels played on

harps in heaven; but it wasn't half so lovely as Mum playing in the

moony night, with him eating a macaroon. A cockchafer buzzed by, a moth

flew in his face, the music stopped, and little Jon drew his head in.

She must be coming! He didn't want to be found awake. He got back into

bed and pulled the clothes nearly over his head; but he had left a

streak of moonlight coming in. It fell across the floor, near the foot

of the bed, and he watched it moving ever so slowly towards him, as if

it were alive. The music began again, but he could only just hear it

now; sleepy music, pretty--sleepy--music--sleepy--slee.....

And time slipped by, the music rose, fell, ceased; the moonbeam crept

towards his face. Little Jon turned in his sleep till he lay on his

back, with one brown fist still grasping the bedclothes. The corners

of his eyes twitched--he had begun to dream. He dreamed he was drinking

milk out of a pan that was the moon, opposite a great black cat which

watched him with a funny smile like his father's. He heard it whisper:

"Don't drink too much!" It was the cat's milk, of course, and he put out

his hand amicably to stroke the creature; but it was no longer there;

the pan had become a bed, in which he was lying, and when he tried to

get out he couldn't find the edge; he couldn't find it--he--he--couldn't

get out! It was dreadful!

He whimpered in his sleep. The bed had begun to go round too; it was

outside him and inside him; going round and round, and getting fiery,

and Mother Lee out of Cast up by the Sea was stirring it! Oh! so

horrible she looked! Faster and faster!--till he and the bed and Mother

Lee and the moon and the cat were all one wheel going round and round

and up and up--awful--awful--awful!

He shrieked.

A voice saying: "Darling, darling!" got through the wheel, and he awoke,

standing on his bed, with his eyes wide open.

There was his mother, with her hair like Guinevere's, and, clutching

her, he buried his face in it.

"Oh! oh!"

"It's all right, treasure. You're awake now. There! There! It's

nothing!"

But little Jon continued to say: "Oh! oh!"

Her voice went on, velvety in his ear:

"It was the moonlight, sweetheart, coming on your face."

Little Jon burbled into her nightgown

"You said it was beautiful. Oh!"

"Not to sleep in, Jon. Who let it in? Did you draw the curtains?"

"I wanted to see the time; I--I looked out, I--I heard you playing,

Mum; I--I ate my macaroon." But he was growing slowly comforted; and the

instinct to excuse his fear revived within him.

"Mother Lee went round in me and got all fiery," he mumbled.

"Well, Jon, what can you expect if you eat macaroons after you've gone

to bed?"

"Only one, Mum; it made the music ever so more beautiful. I was waiting

for you--I nearly thought it was to-morrow."

"My ducky, it's only just eleven now."

Little Jon was silent, rubbing his nose on her neck.

"Mum, is Daddy in your room?"

"Not to-night."

"Can I come?"

"If you wish, my precious."

Half himself again, little Jon drew back.

"You look different, Mum; ever so younger."

"It's my hair, darling."

Little Jon laid hold of it, thick, dark gold, with a few silver threads.

"I like it," he said: "I like you best of all like this."

Taking her hand, he had begun dragging her towards the door. He shut it

as they passed, with a sigh of relief.

"Which side of the bed do you like, Mum?"

"The left side."

"All right."

Wasting no time, giving her no chance to change her mind, little Jon got

into the bed, which seemed much softer than his own. He heaved another

sigh, screwed his head into the pillow and lay examining the battle of

chariots and swords and spears which always went on outside blankets,

where the little hairs stood up against the light.

"It wasn't anything, really, was it?" he said.

From before her glass his mother answered:

"Nothing but the moon and your imagination heated up. You mustn't get so

excited, Jon."

But, still not quite in possession of his nerves, little Jon answered

boastfully:

"I wasn't afraid, really, of course!" And again he lay watching the

spears and chariots. It all seemed very long.

"Oh! Mum, do hurry up!"

"Darling, I have to plait my hair."

"Oh! not to-night. You'll only have to unplait it again to-morrow. I'm

sleepy now; if you don't come, I shan't be sleepy soon."

His mother stood up white and flowey before the winged mirror: he could

see three of her, with her neck turned and her hair bright under the

light, and her dark eyes smiling. It was unnecessary, and he said:

"Do come, Mum; I'm waiting."

"Very well, my love, I'll come."

Little Jon closed his eyes. Everything was turning out most

satisfactory, only she must hurry up! He felt the bed shake, she was

getting in. And, still with his eyes closed, he said sleepily: "It's

nice, isn't it?"

He heard her voice say something, felt her lips touching his nose, and,

snuggling up beside her who lay awake and loved him with her thoughts,

he fell into the dreamless sleep, which rounded off his past.

TO LET

"From out the fatal loins of those two foes

A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life."

--Romeo and Juliet.

TO CHARLES SCRIBNER

PART I

I.--ENCOUNTER

Soames Forsyte emerged from the Knightsbridge Hotel, where he was

staying, in the afternoon of the 12th of May, 1920, with the intention

of visiting a collection of pictures in a Gallery off Cork Street, and

looking into the Future. He walked. Since the War he never took a cab

if he could help it. Their drivers were, in his view, an uncivil lot,

though now that the War was over and supply beginning to exceed demand

again, getting more civil in accordance with the custom of human nature.

Still, he had not forgiven them, deeply identifying them with gloomy

memories, and now, dimly, like all members, of their class, with

revolution. The considerable anxiety he had passed through during the

War, and the more considerable anxiety he had since undergone in the

Peace, had produced psychological consequences in a tenacious nature.

He had, mentally, so frequently experienced ruin, that he had ceased to

believe in its material probability. Paying away four thousand a year in

income and super tax, one could not very well be worse off! A fortune of

a quarter of a million, encumbered only by a wife and one daughter, and

very diversely invested, afforded substantial guarantee even against

that "wildcat notion" a levy on capital. And as to confiscation of war

profits, he was entirely in favour of it, for he had none, and "serve

the beggars right!" The price of pictures, moreover, had, if anything,

gone up, and he had done better with his collection since the War began

than ever before. Air-raids, also, had acted beneficially on a spirit

congenitally cautious, and hardened a character already dogged. To be in

danger of being entirely dispersed inclined one to be less apprehensive

of the more partial dispersions involved in levies and taxation, while

the habit of condemning the impudence of the Germans had led naturally

to condemning that of Labour, if not openly at least in the sanctuary of

his soul.

He walked. There was, moreover, time to spare, for Fleur was to meet him

at the Gallery at four o'clock, and it was as yet but half-past two. It

was good for him to walk--his liver was a little constricted, and his

nerves rather on edge. His wife was always out when she was in Town, and

his daughter would flibberty-gibbet all over the place like most young

women since the War. Still, he must be thankful that she had been too

young to do anything in that War itself. Not, of course, that he had

not supported the War from its inception, with all his soul, but between

that and supporting it with the bodies of his wife and daughter,

there had been a gap fixed by something old-fashioned within him which

abhorred emotional extravagance. He had, for instance, strongly objected

to Annette, so attractive, and in 1914 only thirty-four, going to her

native France, her "chere patrie" as, under the stimulus of war, she had

begun to call it, to nurse her "braves poilus," forsooth! Ruining

her health and her looks! As if she were really a nurse! He had put a

stopper on it. Let her do needlework for them at home, or knit! She had

not gone, therefore, and had never been quite the same woman since. A

bad tendency of hers to mock at him, not openly, but in continual little

ways, had grown. As for Fleur, the War had resolved the vexed problem

whether or not she should go to school. She was better away from her

mother in her war mood, from the chance of air-raids, and the impetus to

do extravagant things; so he had placed her in a seminary as far West

as had seemed to him compatible with excellence, and had missed her

horribly. Fleur! He had never regretted the somewhat outlandish name

by which at her birth he had decided so suddenly to call her--marked

concession though it had been to the French. Fleur! A pretty name--a

pretty child! But restless--too restless; and wilful! Knowing her power

too over her father! Soames often reflected on the mistake it was to

dote on his daughter. To get old and dote! Sixty-five! He was getting

on; but he didn't feel it, for, fortunately perhaps, considering

Annette's youth and good looks, his second marriage had turned out a

cool affair. He had known but one real passion in his life--for that

first wife of his--Irene. Yes, and that fellow, his cousin Jolyon, who

had gone off with her, was looking very shaky, they said. No wonder, at

seventy-two, after twenty years of a third marriage!

Soames paused a moment in his march to lean over the railings of the

Row. A suitable spot for reminiscence, half-way between that house in

Park Lane which had seen his birth and his parents' deaths, and the

little house in Montpellier Square where thirty-five years ago he had

enjoyed his first edition of matrimony. Now, after twenty years of

his second edition, that old tragedy seemed to him like a previous

existence--which had ended when Fleur was born in place of the son he

had hoped for. For many years he had ceased regretting, even vaguely,

the son who had not been born; Fleur filled the bill in his heart. After

all, she bore his name; and he was not looking forward at all to the

time when she would change it. Indeed, if he ever thought of such a

calamity, it was seasoned by the vague feeling that he could make her

rich enough to purchase perhaps and extinguish the name of the fellow

who married her--why not, since, as it seemed, women were equal to men

nowadays? And Soames, secretly convinced that they were not, passed his

curved hand over his face vigorously, till it reached the comfort of his

chin. Thanks to abstemious habits, he had not grown fat and gabby; his

nose was pale and thin, his grey moustache close-clipped, his eyesight

unimpaired. A slight stoop closened and corrected the expansion given to

his face by the heightening of his forehead in the recession of his

grey hair. Little change had Time wrought in the "warmest" of the young

Forsytes, as the last of the old Forsytes--Timothy-now in his hundred

and first year, would have phrased it.

The shade from the plane-trees fell on his neat Homburg hat; he had

given up top hats--it was no use attracting attention to wealth in days

like these. Plane-trees! His thoughts travelled sharply to Madrid--the

Easter before the War, when, having to make up his mind about that Goya

picture, he had taken a voyage of discovery to study the painter on his

spot. The fellow had impressed him--great range, real genius! Highly as

the chap ranked, he would rank even higher before they had finished with

him. The second Goya craze would be greater even than the first;

oh, yes! And he had bought. On that visit he had--as never

before--commissioned a copy of a fresco painting called "La Vendimia,"

wherein was the figure of a girl with an arm akimbo, who had reminded

him of his daughter. He had it now in the Gallery at Mapledurham, and

rather poor it was--you couldn't copy Goya. He would still look at

it, however, if his daughter were not there, for the sake of something

irresistibly reminiscent in the light, erect balance of the figure, the

width between the arching eyebrows, the eager dreaming of the dark eyes.

Curious that Fleur should have dark eyes, when his own were grey--no

pure Forsyte had brown eyes--and her mother's blue! But of course her

grandmother Lamotte's eyes were dark as treacle!

He began to walk on again toward Hyde Park Corner. No greater change

in all England than in the Row! Born almost within hail of it, he

could remember it from 1860 on. Brought there as a child between the

crinolines to stare at tight-trousered dandies in whiskers, riding with

a cavalry seat; to watch the doffing of curly-brimmed and white top

hats; the leisurely air of it all, and the little bow-legged man in

a long red waistcoat who used to come among the fashion with dogs

on several strings, and try to sell one to his mother: King Charles

spaniels, Italian greyhounds, affectionate to her crinoline--you never

saw them now. You saw no quality of any sort, indeed, just working

people sitting in dull rows with nothing to stare at but a few young

bouncing females in pot hats, riding astride, or desultory Colonials

charging up and down on dismal-looking hacks; with, here and there,

little girls on ponies, or old gentlemen jogging their livers, or an

orderly trying a great galumphing cavalry horse; no thoroughbreds, no

grooms, no bowing, no scraping, no gossip--nothing; only the trees the

same--the trees indifferent to the generations and declensions

of mankind. A democratic England--dishevelled, hurried, noisy, and

seemingly without an apex. And that something fastidious in the soul of

Soames turned over within him. Gone forever, the close borough of rank

and polish! Wealth there was--oh, yes! wealth--he himself was a richer

man than his father had ever been; but manners, flavour, quality, all

gone, engulfed in one vast, ugly, shoulder-rubbing, petrol-smelling

Cheerio. Little half-beaten pockets of gentility and caste lurking here

and there, dispersed and chetif, as Annette would say; but nothing ever

again firm and coherent to look up to. And into this new hurly-burly

of bad manners and loose morals his daughter--flower of his life--was

flung! And when those Labour chaps got power--if they ever did--the

worst was yet to come.

He passed out under the archway, at last no longer--thank

goodness!--disfigured by the gungrey of its search-light. 'They'd better

put a search-light on to where they're all going,' he thought, 'and

light up their precious democracy!' And he directed his steps along the

Club fronts of Piccadilly. George Forsyte, of course, would be sitting

in the bay window of the Iseeum. The chap was so big now that he was

there nearly all his time, like some immovable, sardonic, humorous

eye noting the decline of men and things. And Soames hurried, ever

constitutionally uneasy beneath his cousin's glance. George, who, as he

had heard, had written a letter signed "Patriot" in the middle of the

War, complaining of the Government's hysteria in docking the oats of

race-horses. Yes, there he was, tall, ponderous, neat, clean-shaven,

with his smooth hair, hardly thinned, smelling, no doubt, of the best

hair-wash, and a pink paper in his hand. Well, he didn't change! And

for perhaps the first time in his life Soames felt a kind of sympathy

tapping in his waistcoat for that sardonic kinsman. With his weight, his

perfectly parted hair, and bull-like gaze, he was a guarantee that the

old order would take some shifting yet. He saw George move the pink

paper as if inviting him to ascend--the chap must want to ask something

about his property. It was still under Soames' control; for in the

adoption of a sleeping partnership at that painful period twenty

years back when he had divorced Irene, Soames had found himself almost

insensibly retaining control of all purely Forsyte affairs.

Hesitating for just a moment, he nodded and went in. Since the death

of his brother-in-law Montague Dartie, in Paris, which no one had quite

known what to make of, except that it was certainly not suicide--the

Iseeum Club had seemed more respectable to Soames. George, too, he knew,

had sown the last of his wild oats, and was committed definitely to the

joys of the table, eating only of the very best so as to keep his weight

down, and owning, as he said, "just one or two old screws to give me an

interest in life." He joined his cousin, therefore, in the bay window

without the embarrassing sense of indiscretion he had been used to feel

up there. George put out a well-kept hand.

"Haven't seen you since the War," he said. "How's your wife?"

"Thanks," said Soames coldly, "well enough."

Some hidden jest curved, for a moment, George's fleshy face, and gloated

from his eye.

"That Belgian chap, Profond," he said, "is a member here now. He's a rum

customer."

"Quite!" muttered Soames. "What did you want to see me about?"

"Old Timothy; he might go off the hooks at any moment. I suppose he's

made his Will."

"Yes."

"Well, you or somebody ought to give him a look up--last of the old

lot; he's a hundred, you know. They say he's like a mummy. Where are you

goin' to put him? He ought to have a pyramid by rights."

Soames shook his head. "Highgate, the family vault."

"Well, I suppose the old girls would miss him, if he was anywhere else.

They say he still takes an interest in food. He might last on, you know.

Don't we get anything for the old Forsytes? Ten of them--average age

eighty-eight--I worked it out. That ought to be equal to triplets."

"Is that all?" said Soames, "I must be getting on."

'You unsociable devil,' George's eyes seemed to answer. "Yes, that's

all: Look him up in his mausoleum--the old chap might want to prophesy."

The grin died on the rich curves of his face, and he added: "Haven't you

attorneys invented a way yet of dodging this damned income tax? It

hits the fixed inherited income like the very deuce. I used to have two

thousand five hundred a year; now I've got a beggarly fifteen hundred,

and the price of living doubled."

"Ah!" murmured Soames, "the turf's in danger."

Over George's face moved a gleam of sardonic self-defence.

"Well," he said, "they brought me up to do nothing, and here I am in the

sear and yellow, getting poorer every day. These Labour chaps mean to

have the lot before they've done. What are you going to do for a living

when it comes? I shall work a six-hour day teaching politicians how to

see a joke. Take my tip, Soames; go into Parliament, make sure of your

four hundred--and employ me."

And, as Soames retired, he resumed his seat in the bay window.

Soames moved along Piccadilly deep in reflections excited by his

cousin's words. He himself had always been a worker and a saver, George

always a drone and a spender; and yet, if confiscation once began, it

was he--the worker and the saver--who would be looted! That was the

negation of all virtue, the overturning of all Forsyte principles. Could

civilization be built on any other? He did not think so. Well, they

wouldn't confiscate his pictures, for they wouldn't know their worth.

But what would they be worth, if these maniacs once began to milk

capital? A drug on the market. 'I don't care about myself,' he thought;

'I could live on five hundred a year, and never know the difference, at

my age.' But Fleur! This fortune, so widely invested, these treasures so

carefully chosen and amassed, were all for--her. And if it should

turn out that he couldn't give or leave them to her--well, life had

no meaning, and what was the use of going in to look at this crazy,

futuristic stuff with the view of seeing whether it had any future?

Arriving at the Gallery off Cork Street, however, he paid his shilling,

picked up a catalogue, and entered. Some ten persons were prowling

round. Soames took steps and came on what looked to him like a lamp-post

bent by collision with a motor omnibus. It was advanced some three

paces from the wall, and was described in his catalogue as "Jupiter." He

examined it with curiosity, having recently turned some of his attention

to sculpture. 'If that's Jupiter,' he thought, 'I wonder what Juno's

like.' And suddenly he saw her, opposite. She appeared to him like

nothing so much as a pump with two handles, lightly clad in snow. He

was still gazing at her, when two of the prowlers halted on his left.

"Epatant!" he heard one say.

"Jargon!" growled Soames to himself.

The other's boyish voice replied

"Missed it, old bean; he's pulling your leg. When Jove and Juno created

he them, he was saying: 'I'll see how much these fools will swallow.'

And they've lapped up the lot."

"You young duffer! Vospovitch is an innovator. Don't you see that he's

brought satire into sculpture? The future of plastic art, of music,

painting, and even architecture, has set in satiric. It was bound to.

People are tired--the bottom's tumbled out of sentiment."

"Well, I'm quite equal to taking a little interest in beauty. I was

through the War. You've dropped your handkerchief, sir."

Soames saw a handkerchief held out in front of him. He took it with

some natural suspicion, and approached it to his nose. It had the right

scent--of distant Eau de Cologne--and his initials in a corner. Slightly

reassured, he raised his eyes to the young man's face. It had rather

fawn-like ears, a laughing mouth, with half a toothbrush growing out

of it on each side, and small lively eyes, above a normally dressed

appearance.

"Thank you," he said; and moved by a sort of irritation, added: "Glad to

hear you like beauty; that's rare, nowadays."

"I dote on it," said the young man; "but you and I are the last of the

old guard, sir."

Soames smiled.

"If you really care for pictures," he said, "here's my card. I can show

you some quite good ones any Sunday, if you're down the river and care

to look in."

"Awfully nice of you, sir. I'll drop in like a bird. My name's

Mont-Michael." And he took off his hat.

Soames, already regretting his impulse, raised his own slightly in

response, with a downward look at the young man's companion, who had a

purple tie, dreadful little sluglike whiskers, and a scornful look--as

if he were a poet!

It was the first indiscretion he had committed for so long that he went

and sat down in an alcove. What had possessed him to give his card to a

rackety young fellow, who went about with a thing like that? And Fleur,

always at the back of his thoughts, started out like a filigree figure

from a clock when the hour strikes. On the screen opposite the alcove

was a large canvas with a great many square tomato-coloured blobs on

it, and nothing else, so far as Soames could see from where he sat.

He looked at his catalogue: "No. 32 'The Future Town'--Paul Post." 'I

suppose that's satiric too,' he thought. 'What a thing!' But his second

impulse was more cautious. It did not do to condemn hurriedly. There had

been those stripey, streaky creations of Monet's, which had turned out

such trumps; and then the stippled school; and Gauguin. Why, even since

the Post-Impressionists there had been one or two painters not to be

sneezed at. During the thirty-eight years of his connoisseur's life,

indeed, he had marked so many "movements," seen the tides of taste and

technique so ebb and flow, that there was really no telling anything

except that there was money to be made out of every change of fashion.

This too might quite well be a case where one must subdue primordial

instinct, or lose the market. He got up and stood before the picture,

trying hard to see it with the eyes of other people. Above the tomato

blobs was what he took to be a sunset, till some one passing said: "He's

got the airplanes wonderfully, don't you think!" Below the tomato blobs

was a band of white with vertical black stripes, to which he could

assign no meaning whatever, till some one else came by, murmuring: "What

expression he gets with his foreground!" Expression? Of what? Soames

went back to his seat. The thing was "rich," as his father would have

said, and he wouldn't give a damn for it. Expression! Ah! they were all

Expressionists now, he had heard, on the Continent. So it was coming

here too, was it? He remembered the first wave of influenza in 1887--or

'8--hatched in China, so they said. He wondered where this--this

Expressionism had been hatched. The thing was a regular disease!

He had become conscious of a woman and a youth standing between him and

the "Future Town." Their backs were turned; but very suddenly Soames

put his catalogue before his face, and drawing his hat forward, gazed

through the slit between. No mistaking that back, elegant as ever though

the hair above had gone grey. Irene! His divorced wife--Irene! And this,

no doubt, was--her son--by that fellow Jolyon Forsyte--their boy, six

months older than his own girl! And mumbling over in his mind the bitter

days of his divorce, he rose to get out of sight, but quickly sat down

again. She had turned her head to speak to her boy; her profile was

still so youthful that it made her grey hair seem powdery, as if

fancy-dressed; and her lips were smiling as Soames, first possessor

of them, had never seen them smile. Grudgingly he admitted her still

beautiful and in figure almost as young as ever. And how that boy smiled

back at her! Emotion squeezed Soames' heart. The sight infringed his

sense of justice. He grudged her that boy's smile--it went beyond what

Fleur gave him, and it was undeserved. Their son might have been his

son; Fleur might have been her daughter, if she had kept straight! He

lowered his catalogue. If she saw him, all the better! A reminder of

her conduct in the presence of her son, who probably knew nothing of it,

would be a salutary touch from the finger of that Nemesis which surely

must soon or late visit her! Then, half-conscious that such a thought

was extravagant for a Forsyte of his age, Soames took out his watch.

Past four! Fleur was late. She had gone to his niece Imogen Cardigan's,

and there they would keep her smoking cigarettes and gossiping, and

that. He heard the boy laugh, and say eagerly: "I say, Mum, is this by

one of Auntie June's lame ducks?"

"Paul Post--I believe it is, darling."

The word produced a little shock in Soames; he had never heard her use

it. And then she saw him. His eyes must have had in them something of

George Forsyte's sardonic look; for her gloved hand crisped the folds of

her frock, her eyebrows rose, her face went stony. She moved on.

"It is a caution," said the boy, catching her arm again.

Soames stared after them. That boy was good-looking, with a Forsyte

chin, and eyes deep-grey, deep in; but with something sunny, like a

glass of old sherry spilled over him; his smile perhaps, his hair.

Better than they deserved--those two! They passed from his view into the

next room, and Soames continued to regard the Future Town, but saw it

not. A little smile snarled up his lips. He was despising the vehemence

of his own feelings after all these years. Ghosts! And yet as one grew

old--was there anything but what was ghost-like left? Yes, there was

Fleur! He fixed his eyes on the entrance. She was due; but she would

keep him waiting, of course! And suddenly he became aware of a sort of

human breeze--a short, slight form clad in a sea-green djibbah with a

metal belt and a fillet binding unruly red-gold hair all streaked with

grey. She was talking to the Gallery attendants, and something familiar

riveted his gaze--in her eyes, her chin, her hair, her spirit--something

which suggested a thin Skye terrier just before its dinner. Surely June

Forsyte! His cousin June--and coming straight to his recess! She sat

down beside him, deep in thought, took out a tablet, and made a pencil

note. Soames sat unmoving. A confounded thing, cousinship! "Disgusting!"

he heard her murmur; then, as if resenting the presence of an

overhearing stranger, she looked at him. The worst had happened.

"Soames!"

Soames turned his head a very little.

"How are you?" he said. "Haven't seen you for twenty years."

"No. Whatever made you come here?"

"My sins," said Soames. "What stuff!"

"Stuff? Oh, yes--of course; it hasn't arrived yet.

"It never will," said Soames; "it must be making a dead loss."

"Of course it is."

"How d'you know?"

"It's my Gallery."

Soames sniffed from sheer surprise.

"Yours? What on earth makes you run a show like this?"

"I don't treat Art as if it were grocery."

Soames pointed to the Future Town. "Look at that! Who's going to live in

a town like that, or with it on his walls?"

June contemplated the picture for a moment.

"It's a vision," she said.

"The deuce!"

There was silence, then June rose. 'Crazylooking creature!' he thought.

"Well," he said, "you'll find your young stepbrother here with a woman I

used to know. If you take my advice, you'll close this exhibition."

June looked back at him. "Oh! You Forsyte!" she said, and moved on.

About her light, fly-away figure, passing so suddenly away, was a look

of dangerous decisions. Forsyte! Of course, he was a Forsyte! And so was

she! But from the time when, as a mere girl, she brought Bosinney into

his life to wreck it, he had never hit it off with June and never

would! And here she was, unmarried to this day, owning a Gallery!... And

suddenly it came to Soames how little he knew now of his own family.

The old aunts at Timothy's had been dead so many years; there was

no clearing-house for news. What had they all done in the War? Young

Roger's boy had been wounded, St. John Hayman's second son killed; young

Nicholas' eldest had got an O. B. E., or whatever they gave them.

They had all joined up somehow, he believed. That boy of Jolyon's and

Irene's, he supposed, had been too young; his own generation, of course,

too old, though Giles Hayman had driven a car for the Red Cross--and

Jesse Hayman been a special constable--those "Dromios" had always been

of a sporting type! As for himself, he had given a motor ambulance, read

the papers till he was sick of them, passed through much anxiety, bought

no clothes, lost seven pounds in weight; he didn't know what more he

could have done at his age. Indeed, thinking it over, it struck him that

he and his family had taken this war very differently to that affair

with the Boers, which had been supposed to tax all the resources of

the Empire. In that old war, of course, his nephew Val Dartie had

been wounded, that fellow Jolyon's first son had died of enteric, "the

Dromios" had gone out on horses, and June had been a nurse; but all that

had seemed in the nature of a portent, while in this war everybody had

done "their bit," so far as he could make out, as a matter of course. It

seemed to show the growth of something or other--or perhaps the decline

of something else. Had the Forsytes become less individual, or

more Imperial, or less provincial? Or was it simply that one hated

Germans?... Why didn't Fleur come, so that he could get away? He saw

those three return together from the other room and pass back along the

far side of the screen. The boy was standing before the Juno now. And,

suddenly, on the other side of her, Soames saw--his daughter, with

eyebrows raised, as well they might be. He could see her eyes glint

sideways at the boy, and the boy look back at her. Then Irene slipped

her hand through his arm, and drew him on. Soames saw him glancing

round, and Fleur looking after them as the three went out.

A voice said cheerfully: "Bit thick, isn't it, sir?"

The young man who had handed him his handkerchief was again passing.

Soames nodded.

"I don't know what we're coming to."

"Oh! That's all right, sir," answered the young man cheerfully; "they

don't either."

Fleur's voice said: "Hallo, Father! Here you are!" precisely as if he

had been keeping her waiting.

The young man, snatching off his hat, passed on.

"Well," said Soames, looking her up and down, "you're a punctual sort of

young woman!"

This treasured possession of his life was of medium height and colour,

with short, dark chestnut hair; her wide-apart brown eyes were set in

whites so clear that they glinted when they moved, and yet in repose

were almost dreamy under very white, black-lashed lids, held over them

in a sort of suspense. She had a charming profile, and nothing of her

father in her face save a decided chin. Aware that his expression

was softening as he looked at her, Soames frowned to preserve the

unemotionalism proper to a Forsyte. He knew she was only too inclined to

take advantage of his weakness.

Slipping her hand under his arm, she said:

"Who was that?"

"He picked up my handkerchief. We talked about the pictures."

"You're not going to buy that, Father?"

"No," said Soames grimly; "nor that Juno you've been looking at."

Fleur dragged at his arm. "Oh! Let's go! It's a ghastly show."

In the doorway they passed the young man called Mont and his partner.

But Soames had hung out a board marked "Trespassers will be prosecuted,"

and he barely acknowledged the young fellow's salute.

"Well," he said in the street, "whom did you meet at Imogen's?"

"Aunt Winifred, and that Monsieur Profond."

"Oh!" muttered Soames; "that chap! What does your aunt see in him?"

"I don't know. He looks pretty deep--mother says she likes him."

Soames grunted.

"Cousin Val and his wife were there, too."

"What!" said Soames. "I thought they were back in South Africa."

"Oh, no! They've sold their farm. Cousin Val is going to train

race-horses on the Sussex Downs. They've got a jolly old manor-house;

they asked me down there."

Soames coughed: the news was distasteful to him. "What's his wife like

now?"

"Very quiet, but nice, I think."

Soames coughed again. "He's a rackety chap, your Cousin Val."

"Oh! no, Father; they're awfully devoted. I promised to go--Saturday to

Wednesday next."

"Training race-horses!" said Soames. It was extravagant, but not the

reason for his distaste. Why the deuce couldn't his nephew have stayed

out in South Africa? His own divorce had been bad enough, without his

nephew's marriage to the daughter of the co-respondent; a half-sister

too of June, and of that boy whom Fleur had just been looking at from

under the pump-handle. If he didn't look out, she would come to know

all about that old disgrace! Unpleasant things! They were round him this

afternoon like a swarm of bees!

"I don't like it!" he said.

"I want to see the race-horses," murmured Fleur; "and they've promised

I shall ride. Cousin Val can't walk much, you know; but he can ride

perfectly. He's going to show me their gallops."

"Racing!" said Soames. "It's a pity the War didn't knock that on the

head. He's taking after his father, I'm afraid."

"I don't know anything about his father."

"No," said Soames, grimly. "He took an interest in horses and broke his

neck in Paris, walking down-stairs. Good riddance for your aunt."

He frowned, recollecting the inquiry into those stairs which he had

attended in Paris six years ago, because Montague Dartie could not

attend it himself--perfectly normal stairs in a house where they played

baccarat. Either his winnings or the way he had celebrated them had gone

to his brother-in-law's head. The French procedure had been very loose;

he had had a lot of trouble with it.

A sound from Fleur distracted his attention. "Look! The people who were

in the Gallery with us."

"What people?" muttered Soames, who knew perfectly well.

"I think that woman's beautiful."

"Come into this pastry-cook's," said Soames abruptly, and tightening

his grip on her arm he turned into a confectioner's. It was--for him--a

surprising thing to do, and he said rather anxiously: "What will you

have?"

"Oh! I don't want anything. I had a cocktail and a tremendous lunch."

"We must have something now we're here," muttered Soames, keeping hold

of her arm.

"Two teas," he said; "and two of those nougat things."

But no sooner was his body seated than his soul sprang up. Those

three--those three were coming in! He heard Irene say something to her

boy, and his answer:

"Oh! no, Mum; this place is all right. My stunt." And the three sat

down.

At that moment, most awkward of his existence, crowded with ghosts and

shadows from his past, in presence of the only two women he had ever

loved--his divorced wife and his daughter by her successor--Soames

was not so much afraid of them as of his cousin June. She might make

a scene--she might introduce those two children--she was capable of

anything. He bit too hastily at the nougat, and it stuck to his plate.

Working at it with his finger, he glanced at Fleur. She was masticating

dreamily, but her eyes were on the boy. The Forsyte in him said: "Think,

feel, and you're done for!" And he wiggled his finger desperately.

Plate! Did Jolyon wear a plate? Did that woman wear a plate? Time had

been when he had seen her wearing nothing! That was something, anyway,

which had never been stolen from him. And she knew it, though she might

sit there calm and self-possessed, as if she had never been his wife.

An acid humour stirred in his Forsyte blood; a subtle pain divided by

hair's breadth from pleasure. If only June did not suddenly bring her

hornets about his ears! The boy was talking.

"Of course, Auntie June"--so he called his half-sister "Auntie," did

he?--well, she must be fifty, if she was a day!--"it's jolly good of you

to encourage them. Only--hang it all!" Soames stole a glance. Irene's

startled eyes were bent watchfully on her boy. She--she had these

devotions--for Bosinney--for that boy's father--for this boy! He touched

Fleur's arm, and said:

"Well, have you had enough?"

"One more, Father, please."

She would be sick! He went to the counter to pay. When he turned round

again he saw Fleur standing near the door, holding a handkerchief which

the boy had evidently just handed to her.

"F. F.," he heard her say. "Fleur Forsyte--it's mine all right. Thank

you ever so."

Good God! She had caught the trick from what he'd told her in the

Gallery--monkey!

"Forsyte? Why--that's my name too. Perhaps we're cousins."

"Really! We must be. There aren't any others. I live at Mapledurham;

where do you?"

"Robin Hill."

Question and answer had been so rapid that all was over before he could

lift a finger. He saw Irene's face alive with startled feeling, gave the

slightest shake of his head, and slipped his arm through Fleur's.

"Come along!" he said.

She did not move.

"Didn't you hear, Father? Isn't it queer--our name's the same. Are we

cousins?"

"What's that?" he said. "Forsyte? Distant, perhaps."

"My name's Jolyon, sir. Jon, for short."

"Oh! Ah!" said Soames. "Yes. Distant. How are you? Very good of you.

Good-bye!"

He moved on.

"Thanks awfully," Fleur was saying. "Au revoir!"

"Au revoir!" he heard the boy reply.

II.--FINE FLEUR FORSYTE

Emerging from the "pastry-cook's," Soames' first impulse was to vent

his nerves by saying to his daughter: 'Dropping your hand-kerchief!' to

which her reply might well be: 'I picked that up from you!' His second

impulse therefore was to let sleeping dogs lie. But she would surely

question him. He gave her a sidelong look, and found she was giving him

the same. She said softly:

"Why don't you like those cousins, Father?" Soames lifted the corner of

his lip.

"What made you think that?"

"Cela se voit."

'That sees itself!' What a way of putting it! After twenty years of

a French wife Soames had still little sympathy with her language; a

theatrical affair and connected in his mind with all the refinements of

domestic irony.

"How?" he asked.

"You must know them; and you didn't make a sign. I saw them looking at

you."

"I've never seen the boy in my life," replied Soames with perfect truth.

"No; but you've seen the others, dear."

Soames gave her another look. What had she picked up? Had her Aunt

Winifred, or Imogen, or Val Dartie and his wife, been talking? Every

breath of the old scandal had been carefully kept from her at home, and

Winifred warned many times that he wouldn't have a whisper of it reach

her for the world. So far as she ought to know, he had never been

married before. But her dark eyes, whose southern glint and clearness

often almost frightened him, met his with perfect innocence.

"Well," he said, "your grandfather and his brother had a quarrel. The

two families don't know each other."

"How romantic!"

'Now, what does she mean by that?' he thought. The word was to him

extravagant and dangerous--it was as if she had said: "How jolly!"

"And they'll continue not to know each, other," he added, but instantly

regretted the challenge in those words. Fleur was smiling. In this age,

when young people prided themselves on going their own ways and paying

no attention to any sort of decent prejudice, he had said the very thing

to excite her wilfulness. Then, recollecting the expression on Irene's

face, he breathed again.

"What sort of a quarrel?" he heard Fleur say.

"About a house. It's ancient history for you. Your grandfather died the

day you were born. He was ninety."

"Ninety? Are there many Forsytes besides those in the Red Book?"

"I don't know," said Soames. "They're all dispersed now. The old ones

are dead, except Timothy."

Fleur clasped her hands.

"Timothy? Isn't that delicious?"

"Not at all," said Soames. It offended him that she should think

"Timothy" delicious--a kind of insult to his breed. This new generation

mocked at anything solid and tenacious. "You go and see the old boy. He

might want to prophesy." Ah! If Timothy could see the disquiet England

of his great-nephews and great-nieces, he would certainly give tongue.

And involuntarily he glanced up at the Iseeum; yes--George was still in

the window, with the same pink paper in his hand.

"Where is Robin Hill, Father?"

Robin Hill! Robin Hill, round which all that tragedy had centred! What

did she want to know for?

"In Surrey," he muttered; "not far from Richmond. Why?"

"Is the house there?"

"What house?"

"That they quarrelled about."

"Yes. But what's all that to do with you? We're going home

to-morrow--you'd better be thinking about your frocks."

"Bless you! They're all thought about. A family feud? It's like the

Bible, or Mark Twain--awfully exciting. What did you do in the feud,

Father?"

"Never you mind."

"Oh! But if I'm to keep it up?"

"Who said you were to keep it up?"

"You, darling."

"I? I said it had nothing to do with you."

"Just what I think, you know; so that's all right."

She was too sharp for him; fine, as Annette sometimes called her.

Nothing for it but to distract her attention.

"There's a bit of rosaline point in here," he said, stopping before a

shop, "that I thought you might like."

When he had paid for it and they had resumed their progress, Fleur said:

"Don't you think that boy's mother is the most beautiful woman of her

age you've ever seen?"

Soames shivered. Uncanny, the way she stuck to it!

"I don't know that I noticed her."

"Dear, I saw the corner of your eye."

"You see everything--and a great deal more, it seems to me!"

"What's her husband like? He must be your first cousin, if your fathers

were brothers."

"Dead, for all I know," said Soames, with sudden vehemence. "I haven't

seen him for twenty years."

"What was he?"

"A painter."

"That's quite jolly."

The words: "If you want to please me you'll put those people out of your

head," sprang to Soames' lips, but he choked them back--he must not let

her see his feelings.

"He once insulted me," he said.

Her quick eyes rested on his face.

"I see! You didn't avenge it, and it rankles. Poor Father! You let me

have a go!"

It was really like lying in the dark with a mosquito hovering above his

face. Such pertinacity in Fleur was new to him, and, as they reached the

hotel, he said grimly:

"I did my best. And that's enough about these people. I'm going up till

dinner."

"I shall sit here."

With a parting look at her extended in a chair--a look half-resentful,

half-adoring--Soames moved into the lift and was transported to their

suite on the fourth floor. He stood by the window of the sitting-room

which gave view over Hyde Park, and drummed a finger on its pane. His

feelings were confused, tetchy, troubled. The throb of that old wound,

scarred over by Time and new interests, was mingled with displeasure

and anxiety, and a slight pain in his chest where that nougat stuff had

disagreed. Had Annette come in? Not that she was any good to him in such

a difficulty. Whenever she had questioned him about his first marriage,

he had always shut her up; she knew nothing of it, save that it had

been the great passion of his life, and his marriage with herself

but domestic makeshift. She had always kept the grudge of that up her

sleeve, as it were, and used it commercially. He listened. A sound--the

vague murmur of a woman's movements--was coming through the door. She

was in. He tapped.

"Who?"

"I," said Soames.

She had been changing her frock, and was still imperfectly clothed; a

striking figure before her glass. There was a certain magnificence about

her arms, shoulders, hair, which had darkened since he first knew

her, about the turn of her neck, the silkiness of her garments, her

dark-lashed, greyblue eyes--she was certainly as handsome at forty

as she had ever been. A fine possession, an excellent housekeeper, a

sensible and affectionate enough mother. If only she weren't always so

frankly cynical about the relations between them! Soames, who had no

more real affection for her than she had for him, suffered from a kind

of English grievance in that she had never dropped even the thinnest

veil of sentiment over their partnership. Like most of his countrymen

and women, he held the view that marriage should be based on mutual

love, but that when from a marriage love had disappeared, or, been found

never to have really existed--so that it was manifestly not based on

love--you must not admit it. There it was, and the love was not--but

there you were, and must continue to be! Thus you had it both ways, and

were not tarred with cynicism, realism, and immorality like the French.

Moreover, it was necessary in the interests of property. He knew that

she knew that they both knew there was no love between them, but he

still expected her not to admit in words or conduct such a thing, and he

could never understand what she meant when she talked of the hypocrisy

of the English. He said:

"Whom have you got at 'The Shelter' next week?"

Annette went on touching her lips delicately with salve--he always

wished she wouldn't do that.

"Your sister Winifred, and the Car-r-digans"--she took up a tiny stick

of black--"and Prosper Profond."

"That Belgian chap? Why him?"

Annette turned her neck lazily, touched one eyelash, and said:

"He amuses Winifred."

"I want some one to amuse Fleur; she's restive."

"R-restive?" repeated Annette. "Is it the first time you see that, my

friend? She was born r-restive, as you call it."

Would she never get that affected roll out of her r's?

He touched the dress she had taken off, and asked:

"What have you been doing?"

Annette looked at him, reflected in her glass. Her just-brightened lips

smiled, rather full, rather ironical.

"Enjoying myself," she said.

"Oh!" answered Soames glumly. "Ribbandry, I suppose."

It was his word for all that incomprehensible running in and out of

shops that women went in for. "Has Fleur got her summer dresses?"

"You don't ask if I have mine."

"You don't care whether I do or not."

"Quite right. Well, she has; and I have mine--terribly expensive."

"H'm!" said Soames. "What does that chap Profond do in England?"

Annette raised the eyebrows she had just finished.

"He yachts."

"Ah!" said Soames; "he's a sleepy chap."

"Sometimes," answered Annette, and her face had a sort of quiet

enjoyment. "But sometimes very amusing."

"He's got a touch of the tar-brush about him."

Annette stretched herself.

"Tar-brush?" she said. "What is that? His mother was Armenienne."

"That's it, then," muttered Soames. "Does he know anything about

pictures?"

"He knows about everything--a man of the world."

"Well, get some one for Fleur. I want to distract her. She's going off

on Saturday to Val Dartie and his wife; I don't like it."

"Why not?"

Since the reason could not be explained without going into family

history, Soames merely answered:

"Racketing about. There's too much of it."

"I like that little Mrs. Val; she is very quiet and clever."

"I know nothing of her except--This thing's new." And Soames took up a

creation from the bed.

Annette received it from him.

"Would you hook me?" she said.

Soames hooked. Glancing once over her shoulder into the glass, he saw

the expression on her face, faintly amused, faintly contemptuous, as

much as to say: "Thanks! You will never learn!" No, thank God, he wasn't

a Frenchman! He finished with a jerk, and the words: "It's too low

here." And he went to the door, with the wish to get away from her and

go down to Fleur again.

Annette stayed a powder-puff, and said with startling suddenness

"Que tu es grossier!"

He knew the expression--he had reason to. The first time she had used

it he had thought it meant "What a grocer you are!" and had not known

whether to be relieved or not when better informed. He resented the

word--he was not coarse! If he was coarse, what was that chap in the

room beyond his, who made those horrible noises in the morning when

he cleared his throat, or those people in the Lounge who thought it

well-bred to say nothing but what the whole world could hear at the top

of their voices--quacking inanity! Coarse, because he had said her dress

was low! Well, so it was! He went out without reply.

Coming into the Lounge from the far end, he at once saw Fleur where he

had left her. She sat with crossed knees, slowly balancing a foot in

silk stocking and grey shoe, sure sign that she was dreaming. Her eyes

showed it too--they went off like that sometimes. And then, in a moment,

she would come to life, and be as quick and restless as a monkey. And

she knew so much, so self-assured, and not yet nineteen. What was that

odious word? Flapper! Dreadful young creatures--squealing and squawking

and showing their legs! The worst of them bad dreams, the best of them

powdered angels! Fleur was not a flapper, not one of those slangy,

ill-bred young females. And yet she was frighteningly self-willed, and

full of life, and determined to enjoy it. Enjoy! The word brought

no puritan terror to Soames; but it brought the terror suited to his

temperament. He had always been afraid to enjoy to-day for fear he

might not enjoy tomorrow so much. And it was terrifying to feel that his

daughter was divested of that safeguard. The very way she sat in that

chair showed it--lost in her dream. He had never been lost in a dream

himself--there was nothing to be had out of it; and where she got it

from he did not know! Certainly not from Annette! And yet Annette, as a

young girl, when he was hanging about her, had once had a flowery look.

Well, she had lost it now!

Fleur rose from her chair-swiftly, restlessly; and flung herself down at

a writing-table. Seizing ink and writing paper, she began to write as

if she had not time to breathe before she got her letter written. And

suddenly she saw him. The air of desperate absorption vanished, she

smiled, waved a kiss, made a pretty face as if she were a little puzzled

and a little bored.

Ah! She was "fine"--"fine!"

III.--AT ROBIN HILL

Jolyon Forsyte had spent his boy's nineteenth birthday at Robin Hill,

quietly going into his affairs. He did everything quietly now, because

his heart was in a poor way, and, like all his family, he disliked the

idea of dying. He had never realised how much till one day, two years

ago, he had gone to his doctor about certain symptoms, and been told:

"At any moment, on any overstrain."

He had taken it with a smile--the natural Forsyte reaction against an

unpleasant truth. But with an increase of symptoms in the train on the

way home, he had realised to the full the sentence hanging over him. To

leave Irene, his boy, his home, his work--though he did little enough

work now! To leave them for unknown darkness, for the unimaginable

state, for such nothingness that he would not even be conscious of wind

stirring leaves above his grave, nor of the scent of earth and grass.

Of such nothingness that, however hard he might try to conceive it, he

never could, and must still hover on the hope that he might see again

those he loved! To realise this was to endure very poignant spiritual

anguish. Before he reached home that day he had determined to keep it

from Irene. He would have to be more careful than man had ever been, for

the least thing would give it away and make her as wretched as himself,

almost. His doctor had passed him sound in other respects, and seventy

was nothing of an age--he would last a long time yet, if he could.

Such a conclusion, followed out for nearly two years, develops to the

full the subtler side of character. Naturally not abrupt, except when

nervously excited, Jolyon had become control incarnate. The sad patience

of old people who cannot exert themselves was masked by a smile which

his lips preserved even in private. He devised continually all manner of

cover to conceal his enforced lack of exertion.

Mocking himself for so doing, he counterfeited conversion to the Simple

Life; gave up wine and cigars, drank a special kind of coffee with no

coffee in it. In short, he made himself as safe as a Forsyte in

his condition could, under the rose of his mild irony. Secure from

discovery, since his wife and son had gone up to Town, he had spent the

fine May day quietly arranging his papers, that he might die to-morrow

without inconveniencing any one, giving in fact a final polish to his

terrestrial state. Having docketed and enclosed it in his father's

old Chinese cabinet, he put the key into an envelope, wrote the words

outside: "Key of the Chinese cabinet, wherein will be found the exact

state of me, J. F.," and put it in his breast-pocket, where it would be

always about him, in case of accident. Then, ringing for tea, he went

out to have it under the old oak-tree.

All are under sentence of death; Jolyon, whose sentence was but a little

more precise and pressing, had become so used to it that he thought

habitually, like other people, of other things. He thought of his son

now.

Jon was nineteen that day, and Jon had come of late to a decision.

Educated neither at Eton like his father, nor at Harrow, like his dead

half-brother, but at one of those establishments which, designed to

avoid the evil and contain the good of the Public School system, may

or may not contain the evil and avoid the good, Jon had left in April

perfectly ignorant of what he wanted to become. The War, which had

promised to go on for ever, had ended just as he was about to join the

Army, six months before his time. It had taken him ever since to get

used to the idea that he could now choose for himself. He had held with

his father several discussions, from which, under a cheery show of being

ready for anything--except, of course, the Church, Army, Law, Stage,

Stock Exchange, Medicine, Business, and Engineering--Jolyon had gathered

rather clearly that Jon wanted to go in for nothing. He himself had felt

exactly like that at the same age. With him that pleasant vacuity had

soon been ended by an early marriage, and its unhappy consequences.

Forced to become an underwriter at Lloyd's, he had regained prosperity

before his artistic talent had outcropped. But having--as the simple

say--"learned" his boy to draw pigs and other animals, he knew that

Jon would never be a painter, and inclined to the conclusion that his

aversion from everything else meant that he was going to be a writer.

Holding, however, the view that experience was necessary even for that

profession, there seemed to Jolyon nothing in the meantime, for Jon, but

University, travel, and perhaps the eating of dinners for the Bar. After

that one would see, or more probably one would not. In face of these

proffered allurements, however, Jon had remained undecided.

Such discussions with his son had confirmed in Jolyon a doubt whether

the world had really changed. People said that it was a new age. With

the profundity of one not too long for any age, Jolyon perceived that

under slightly different surfaces the era was precisely what it had

been. Mankind was still divided into two species: The few who had

"speculation" in their souls, and the many who had none, with a belt of

hybrids like himself in the middle. Jon appeared to have speculation; it

seemed to his father a bad lookout.

With something deeper, therefore, than his usual smile, he had heard

the boy say, a fortnight ago: "I should like to try farming, Dad; if it

won't cost you too much. It seems to be about the only sort of life

that doesn't hurt anybody; except art, and of course that's out of the

question for me."

Jolyon subdued his smile, and answered:

"All right; you shall skip back to where we were under the first Jolyon

in 1760. It'll prove the cycle theory, and incidentally, no doubt, you

may grow a better turnip than he did."

A little dashed, Jon had answered:

"But don't you think it's a good scheme, Dad?"

"'Twill serve, my dear; and if you should really take to it, you'll do

more good than most men, which is little enough."

To himself, however, he had said: 'But he won't take to it. I give him

four years. Still, it's healthy, and harmless.'

After turning the matter over and consulting with Irene, he wrote to his

daughter, Mrs. Val Dartie, asking if they knew of a farmer near them on

the Downs who would take Jon as an apprentice. Holly's answer had been

enthusiastic. There was an excellent man quite close; she and Val would

love Jon to live with them.

The boy was due to go to-morrow.

Sipping weak tea with lemon in it, Jolyon gazed through the leaves of

the old oak-tree at that view which had appeared to him desirable for

thirty-two years. The tree beneath which he sat seemed not a day

older! So young, the little leaves of brownish gold; so old, the

whitey-grey-green of its thick rough trunk. A tree of memories, which

would live on hundreds of years yet, unless some barbarian cut it

down--would see old England out at the pace things were going! He

remembered a night three years before, when, looking from his window,

with his arm close round Irene, he had watched a German aeroplane

hovering, it seemed, right over the old tree. Next day they had found a

bomb hole in a field on Gage's farm. That was before he knew that he

was under sentence of death. He could almost have wished the bomb had

finished him. It would have saved a lot of hanging about, many hours

of cold fear in the pit of his stomach. He had counted on living to the

normal Forsyte age of eighty-five or more, when Irene would be seventy.

As it was, she would miss him. Still there was Jon, more important in

her life than himself; Jon, who adored his mother.

Under that tree, where old Jolyon--waiting for Irene to come to him

across the lawn--had breathed his last, Jolyon wondered, whimsically,

whether, having put everything in such perfect order, he had not better

close his own eyes and drift away. There was something undignified in

parasitically clinging on to the effortless close of a life wherein

he regretted two things only--the long division between his father and

himself when he was young, and the lateness of his union with Irene.

From where he sat he could see a cluster of apple-trees in blossom.

Nothing in Nature moved him so much as fruit-trees in blossom; and

his heart ached suddenly because he might never see them flower again.

Spring! Decidedly no man ought to have to die while his heart was

still young enough to love beauty! Blackbirds sang recklessly in the

shrubbery, swallows were flying high, the leaves above him glistened;

and over the fields was every imaginable tint of early foliage,

burnished by the level sunlight, away to where the distant "smoke-bush"

blue was trailed along the horizon. Irene's flowers in their narrow beds

had startling individuality that evening, little deep assertions of

gay life. Only Chinese and Japanese painters, and perhaps Leonardo, had

known how to get that startling little ego into each painted flower, and

bird, and beast--the ego, yet the sense of species, the universality of

life as well. They were the fellows! 'I've made nothing that will live!'

thought Jolyon; 'I've been an amateur--a mere lover, not a creator.

Still, I shall leave Jon behind me when I go.' What luck that the boy

had not been caught by that ghastly war! He might so easily have been

killed, like poor Jolly twenty years ago out in the Transvaal. Jon would

do something some day--if the Age didn't spoil him--an imaginative chap!

His whim to take up farming was but a bit of sentiment, and about as

likely to last. And just then he saw them coming up the field: Irene and

the boy; walking from the station, with their arms linked. And getting

up, he strolled down through the new rose garden to meet them....

Irene came into his room that night and sat down by the window. She sat

there without speaking till he said:

"What is it, my love?"

"We had an encounter to-day."

"With whom?"

"Soames."

Soames! He had kept that name out of his thoughts these last two years;

conscious that it was bad for him. And, now, his heart moved in a

disconcerting manner, as if it had side-slipped within his chest.

Irene went on quietly:

"He and his daughter were in the Gallery, and afterward at the

confectioner's where we had tea."

Jolyon went over and put his hand on her shoulder.

"How did he look?"

"Grey; but otherwise much the same."

"And the daughter?"

"Pretty. At least, Jon thought so."

Jolyon's heart side-slipped again. His wife's face had a strained and

puzzled look.

"You didn't-?" he began.

"No; but Jon knows their name. The girl dropped her handkerchief and he

picked it up."

Jolyon sat down on his bed. An evil chance!

"June was with you. Did she put her foot into it?"

"No; but it was all very queer and strained, and Jon could see it was."

Jolyon drew a long breath, and said:

"I've often wondered whether we've been right to keep it from him. He'll

find out some day."

"The later the better, Jolyon; the young have such cheap, hard judgment.

When you were nineteen what would you have thought of your mother if she

had done what I have?"

Yes! There it was! Jon worshipped his mother; and knew nothing of the

tragedies, the inexorable necessities of life, nothing of the prisoned

grief in an unhappy marriage, nothing of jealousy or passion--knew

nothing at all, as yet!

"What have you told him?" he said at last.

"That they were relations, but we didn't know them; that you had never

cared much for your family, or they for you. I expect he will be asking

you."

Jolyon smiled. "This promises to take the place of air-raids," he said.

"After all, one misses them."

Irene looked up at him.

"We've known it would come some day."

He answered her with sudden energy:

"I could never stand seeing Jon blame you. He shan't do that, even in

thought. He has imagination; and he'll understand if it's put to

him properly. I think I had better tell him before he gets to know

otherwise."

"Not yet, Jolyon."

That was like her--she had no foresight, and never went to meet trouble.

Still--who knew?--she might be right. It was ill going against a

mother's instinct. It might be well to let the boy go on, if possible,

till experience had given him some touchstone by which he could judge

the values of that old tragedy; till love, jealousy, longing, had

deepened his charity. All the same, one must take precautions--every

precaution possible! And, long after Irene had left him, he lay awake

turning over those precautions. He must write to Holly, telling her that

Jon knew nothing as yet of family history. Holly was discreet, she would

make sure of her husband, she would see to it! Jon could take the letter

with him when he went to-morrow.

And so the day on which he had put the polish on his material estate

died out with the chiming of the stable clock; and another began for

Jolyon in the shadow of a spiritual disorder which could not be so

rounded off and polished....

But Jon, whose room had once been his day nursery, lay awake too, the

prey of a sensation disputed by those who have never known it, "love at

first sight!" He had felt it beginning in him with the glint of those

dark eyes gazing into his athwart the Juno--a conviction that this was

his 'dream'; so that what followed had seemed to him at once natural

and miraculous. Fleur! Her name alone was almost enough for one who was

terribly susceptible to the charm of words. In a homoeopathic Age, when

boys and girls were co-educated, and mixed up in early life till sex was

almost abolished, Jon was singularly old-fashioned. His modern school

took boys only, and his holidays had been spent at Robin Hill with boy

friends, or his parents alone. He had never, therefore, been inoculated

against the germs of love by small doses of the poison. And now in

the dark his temperature was mounting fast. He lay awake, featuring

Fleur--as they called it--recalling her words, especially that "Au

revoir!" so soft and sprightly.

He was still so wide awake at dawn that he got up, slipped on tennis

shoes, trousers, and a sweater, and in silence crept downstairs and out

through the study window. It was just light; there was a smell of grass.

'Fleur!' he thought; 'Fleur!' It was mysteriously white out of doors,

with nothing awake except the birds just beginning to chirp. 'I'll go

down into the coppice,' he thought. He ran down through the fields,

reached the pond just as the sun rose, and passed into the coppice.

Bluebells carpeted the ground there; among the larch-trees there was

mystery--the air, as it were, composed of that romantic quality. Jon

sniffed its freshness, and stared at the bluebells in the sharpening

light. Fleur! It rhymed with her! And she lived at Mapleduram--a

jolly name, too, on the river somewhere. He could find it in the atlas

presently. He would write to her. But would she answer? Oh! She must.

She had said "Au revoir!" Not good-bye! What luck that she had dropped

her handkerchief! He would never have known her but for that. And the

more he thought of that handkerchief, the more amazing his luck seemed.

Fleur! It certainly rhymed with her! Rhythm thronged his head; words

jostled to be joined together; he was on the verge of a poem.

Jon remained in this condition for more than half an hour, then returned

to the house, and getting a ladder, climbed in at his bedroom window out

of sheer exhilaration. Then, remembering that the study window was open,

he went down and shut it, first removing the ladder, so as to obliterate

all traces of his feeling. The thing was too deep to be revealed to

mortal soul-even-to his mother.

IV.--THE MAUSOLEUM

There are houses whose souls have passed into the limbo of Time, leaving

their bodies in the limbo of London. Such was not quite the condition of

"Timothy's" on the Bayswater Road, for Timothy's soul still had one foot

in Timothy Forsyte's body, and Smither kept the atmosphere unchanging,

of camphor and port wine and house whose windows are only opened to air

it twice a day.

To Forsyte imagination that house was now a sort of Chinese pill-box,

a series of layers in the last of which was Timothy. One did not reach

him, or so it was reported by members of the family who, out of old-time

habit or absentmindedness, would drive up once in a blue moon and ask

after their surviving uncle. Such were Francie, now quite emancipated

from God (she frankly avowed atheism), Euphemia, emancipated from old

Nicholas, and Winifred Dartie from her "man of the world." But, after

all, everybody was emancipated now, or said they were--perhaps not quite

the same thing!

When Soames, therefore, took it on his way to Paddington station on

the morning after that encounter, it was hardly with the expectation of

seeing Timothy in the flesh. His heart made a faint demonstration within

him while he stood in full south sunlight on the newly whitened doorstep

of that little house where four Forsytes had once lived, and now but one

dwelt on like a winter fly; the house into which Soames had come and

out of which he had gone times without number, divested of, or burdened

with, fardels of family gossip; the house of the "old people" of another

century, another age.

The sight of Smither--still corseted up to the armpits because the new

fashion which came in as they were going out about 1903 had never been

considered "nice" by Aunts Juley and Hester--brought a pale friendliness

to Soames' lips; Smither, still faithfully arranged to old pattern in

every detail, an invaluable servant--none such left--smiling back at

him, with the words: "Why! it's Mr. Soames, after all this time! And how

are you, sir? Mr. Timothy will be so pleased to know you've been."

"How is he?"

"Oh! he keeps fairly bobbish for his age, sir; but of course he's a

wonderful man. As I said to Mrs. Dartie when she was here last: It

would please Miss Forsyte and Mrs. Juley and Miss Hester to see how he

relishes a baked apple still. But he's quite deaf. And a mercy, I always

think. For what we should have done with him in the air-raids, I don't

know."

"Ah!" said Soames. "What did you do with him?"

"We just left him in his bed, and had the bell run down into the cellar,

so that Cook and I could hear him if he rang. It would never have done

to let him know there was a war on. As I said to Cook, 'If Mr. Timothy

rings, they may do what they like--I'm going up. My dear mistresses

would have a fit if they could see him ringing and nobody going to him.'

But he slept through them all beautiful. And the one in the daytime he

was having his bath. It was a mercy, because he might have noticed the

people in the street all looking up--he often looks out of the window."

"Quite!" murmured Soames. Smither was getting garrulous! "I just want to

look round and see if there's anything to be done."

"Yes, sir. I don't think there's anything except a smell of mice in the

dining-room that we don't know how to get rid of. It's funny they should

be there, and not a crumb, since Mr. Timothy took to not coming down,

just before the War. But they're nasty little things; you never know

where they'll take you next."

"Does he leave his bed?"--

"Oh! yes, sir; he takes nice exercise between his bed and the window in

the morning, not to risk a change of air. And he's quite comfortable in

himself; has his Will out every day regular. It's a great consolation to

him--that."

"Well, Smither, I want to see him, if I can; in case he has anything to

say to me."

Smither coloured up above her corsets.

"It will be an occasion!" she said. "Shall I take you round the house,

sir, while I send Cook to break it to him?"

"No, you go to him," said Soames. "I can go round the house by myself."

One could not confess to sentiment before another, and Soames felt that

he was going to be sentimental nosing round those rooms so saturated

with the past. When Smither, creaking with excitement, had left him,

Soames entered the dining-room and sniffed. In his opinion it wasn't

mice, but incipient wood-rot, and he examined the panelling. Whether it

was worth a coat of paint, at Timothy's age, he was not sure. The room

had always been the most modern in the house; and only a faint smile

curled Soames' lips and nostrils. Walls of a rich green surmounted

the oak dado; a heavy metal chandelier hung by a chain from a ceiling

divided by imitation beams. The pictures had been bought by Timothy,

a bargain, one day at Jobson's sixty years ago--three Snyder "still

lifes," two faintly coloured drawings of a boy and a girl, rather

charming, which bore the initials "J. R."--Timothy had always believed

they might turn out to be Joshua Reynolds, but Soames, who admired them,

had discovered that they were only John Robinson; and a doubtful Morland

of a white pony being shod. Deep-red plush curtains, ten high-backed

dark mahogany chairs with deep-red plush seats, a Turkey carpet, and

a mahogany dining-table as large as the room was small, such was an

apartment which Soames could remember unchanged in soul or body since

he was four years old. He looked especially at the two drawings, and

thought: 'I shall buy those at the sale.'

From the dining-room he passed into Timothy's study. He did not remember

ever having been in that room. It was lined from floor to ceiling with

volumes, and he looked at them with curiosity. One wall seemed devoted

to educational books, which Timothy's firm had published two generations

back-sometimes as many as twenty copies of one book. Soames read their

titles and shuddered. The middle wall had precisely the same books as

used to be in the library at his own father's in Park Lane, from which

he deduced the fancy that James and his youngest brother had gone out

together one day and bought a brace of small libraries. The third wall

he approached with more excitement. Here, surely, Timothy's own taste

would be found. It was. The books were dummies. The fourth wall was all

heavily curtained window. And turned toward it was a large chair with a

mahogany reading-stand attached, on which a yellowish and folded copy

of The Times, dated July 6, 1914, the day Timothy first failed to come

down, as if in preparation for the War, seemed waiting for him still.

In a corner stood a large globe of that world never visited by Timothy,

deeply convinced of the unreality of everything but England, and

permanently upset by the sea, on which he had been very sick one Sunday

afternoon in 1836, out of a pleasure boat off the pier at Brighton, with

Juley and Hester, Swithin and Hatty Chessman; all due to Swithin, who

was always taking things into his head, and who, thank goodness, had

been sick too. Soames knew all about it, having heard the tale fifty

times at least from one or other of them. He went up to the globe,

and gave it a spin; it emitted a faint creak and moved about an inch,

bringing into his purview a daddy-long-legs which had died on it in

latitude 44.

'Mausoleum!' he thought. 'George was right!' And he went out and up

the stairs. On the half-landing he stopped before the case of stuffed

humming-birds which had delighted his childhood. They looked not a day

older, suspended on wires above pampas-grass. If the case were opened

the birds would not begin to hum, but the whole thing would crumble, he

suspected. It wouldn't be worth putting that into the sale! And suddenly

he was caught by a memory of Aunt Ann--dear old Aunt Ann--holding him

by the hand in front of that case and saying: "Look, Soamey! Aren't they

bright and pretty, dear little humming-birds!" Soames remembered his

own answer: "They don't hum, Auntie." He must have been six, in a black

velveteen suit with a light-blue collar-he remembered that suit well!

Aunt Ann with her ringlets, and her spidery kind hands, and her grave

old aquiline smile--a fine old lady, Aunt Ann! He moved on up to

the drawing-room door. There on each side of it were the groups of

miniatures. Those he would certainly buy in! The miniatures of his

four aunts, one of his Uncle Swithin adolescent, and one of his Uncle

Nicholas as a boy. They had all been painted by a young lady friend of

the family at a time, 1830, about, when miniatures were considered very

genteel, and lasting too, painted as they were on ivory. Many a time had

he heard the tale of that young lady: "Very talented, my dear; she

had quite a weakness for Swithin, and very soon after she went into a

consumption and died: so like Keats--we often spoke of it."

Well, there they were! Ann, Juley, Hester, Susan--quite a small

child; Swithin, with sky-blue eyes, pink cheeks, yellow curls, white

waistcoat-large as life; and Nicholas, like Cupid with an eye on heaven.

Now he came to think of it, Uncle Nick had always been rather like

that--a wonderful man to the last. Yes, she must have had talent, and

miniatures always had a certain back-watered cachet of their own, little

subject to the currents of competition on aesthetic Change. Soames

opened the drawing-room door. The room was dusted, the furniture

uncovered, the curtains drawn back, precisely as if his aunts still

dwelt there patiently waiting. And a thought came to him: When

Timothy died--why not? Would it not be almost a duty to preserve this

house--like Carlyle's--and put up a tablet, and show it? "Specimen of

mid-Victorian abode--entrance, one shilling, with catalogue." After all,

it was the completest thing, and perhaps the deadest in the London of

to-day. Perfect in its special taste and culture, if, that is, he took

down and carried over to his own collection the four Barbizon pictures

he had given them. The still sky-blue walls, tile green curtains

patterned with red flowers and ferns; the crewel-worked fire-screen

before the cast-iron grate; the mahogany cupboard with glass windows,

full of little knickknacks; the beaded footstools; Keats, Shelley,

Southey, Cowper, Coleridge, Byron's Corsair (but nothing else), and the

Victorian poets in a bookshelf row; the marqueterie cabinet lined with

dim red plush, full of family relics: Hester's first fan; the buckles

of their mother's father's shoes; three bottled scorpions; and one

very yellow elephant's tusk, sent home from India by Great-uncle Edgar

Forsyte, who had been in jute; a yellow bit of paper propped up,

with spidery writing on it, recording God knew what! And the pictures

crowding on the walls--all water-colours save those four Barbizons

looking like the foreigners they were, and doubtful customers at

that--pictures bright and illustrative, "Telling the Bees," "Hey for the

Ferry!" and two in the style of Frith, all thimblerig and crinolines,

given them by Swithin. Oh! many, many pictures at which Soames had gazed

a thousand times in supercilious fascination; a marvellous collection of

bright, smooth gilt frames.

And the boudoir-grand piano, beautifully dusted, hermetically sealed

as ever; and Aunt Juley's album of pressed seaweed on it. And the

gilt-legged chairs, stronger than they looked. And on one side of the

fireplace the sofa of crimson silk, where Aunt Ann, and after her Aunt

Juley, had been wont to sit, facing the light and bolt upright. And on

the other side of the fire the one really easy chair, back to the light,

for Aunt Hester. Soames screwed up his eyes; he seemed to see them

sitting there. Ah! and the atmosphere--even now, of too many stuffs and

washed lace curtains, lavender in bags, and dried bees' wings. 'No,' he

thought, 'there's nothing like it left; it ought to be preserved.' And,

by George, they might laugh at it, but for a standard of gentle life

never departed from, for fastidiousness of skin and eye and nose and

feeling, it beat to-day hollow--to-day with its Tubes and cars, its

perpetual smoking, its cross-legged, bare-necked girls visible up to the

knees and down to the waist if you took the trouble (agreeable to the

satyr within each Forsyte but hardly his idea of a lady), with their

feet, too, screwed round the legs of their chairs while they ate, and

their "So longs," and their "Old Beans," and their laughter--girls who

gave him the shudders whenever he thought of Fleur in contact with them;

and the hard-eyed, capable, older women who managed life and gave him

the shudders too. No! his old aunts, if they never opened their minds,

their eyes, or very much their windows, at least had manners, and a

standard, and reverence for past and future.

With rather a choky feeling he closed the door and went tiptoeing

upstairs. He looked in at a place on the way: H'm! in perfect order of

the eighties, with a sort of yellow oilskin paper on the walls. At the

top of the stairs he hesitated between four doors. Which of them was

Timothy's? And he listened. A sound, as of a child slowly dragging a

hobby-horse about, came to his ears. That must be Timothy! He tapped,

and a door was opened by Smither, very red in the face.

Mr. Timothy was taking his walk, and she had not been able to get him

to attend. If Mr. Soames would come into the back-room, he could see him

through the door.

Soames went into the back-room and stood watching.

The last of the old Forsytes was on his feet, moving with the most

impressive slowness, and an air of perfect concentration on his own

affairs, backward and forward between the foot of his bed and the

window, a distance of some twelve feet. The lower part of his square

face, no longer clean-shaven, was covered with snowy beard clipped as

short as it could be, and his chin looked as broad as his brow where the

hair was also quite white, while nose and cheeks and brow were a good

yellow. One hand held a stout stick, and the other grasped the skirt of

his Jaeger dressing-gown, from under which could be seen his bed-socked

ankles and feet thrust into Jaeger slippers. The expression on his face

was that of a crossed child, intent on something that he has not got.

Each time he turned he stumped the stick, and then dragged it, as if to

show that he could do without it:

"He still looks strong," said Soames under his breath.

"Oh! yes, sir. You should see him take his bath--it's wonderful; he does

enjoy it so."

Those quite loud words gave Soames an insight. Timothy had resumed his

babyhood.

"Does he take any interest in things generally?" he said, also loud.

"Oh! yes, sir; his food and his Will. It's quite a sight to see him

turn it over and over, not to read it, of course; and every now and then

he asks the price of Consols, and I write it on a slate for him--very

large. Of course, I always write the same, what they were when he last

took notice, in 1914. We got the doctor to forbid him to read the paper

when the War broke out. Oh! he did take on about that at first. But

he soon came round, because he knew it tired him; and he's a wonder

to conserve energy as he used to call it when my dear mistresses were

alive, bless their hearts! How he did go on at them about that; they

were always so active, if you remember, Mr. Soames."

"What would happen if I were to go in?" asked Soames: "Would he remember

me? I made his Will, you know, after Miss Hester died in 1907."

"Oh! that, sir," replied Smither doubtfully, "I couldn't take on me to

say. I think he might; he really is a wonderful man for his age."

Soames moved into the doorway, and waiting for Timothy to turn, said in

a loud voice: "Uncle Timothy!"

Timothy trailed back half-way, and halted.

"Eh?" he said.

"Soames," cried Soames at the top of his voice, holding out his hand,

"Soames Forsyte!"

"No!" said Timothy, and stumping his stick loudly on the floor, he

continued his walk.

"It doesn't seem to work," said Soames.

"No, sir," replied Smither, rather crestfallen; "you see, he hasn't

finished his walk. It always was one thing at a time with him. I expect

he'll ask me this afternoon if you came about the gas, and a pretty job

I shall have to make him understand."

"Do you think he ought to have a man about him?"

Smither held up her hands. "A man! Oh! no. Cook and me can manage

perfectly. A strange man about would send him crazy in no time. And my

mistresses wouldn't like the idea of a man in the house. Besides, we're

so--proud of him."

"I suppose the doctor comes?"

"Every morning. He makes special terms for such a quantity, and Mr.

Timothy's so used, he doesn't take a bit of notice, except to put out

his tongue."

"Well," said Soames, turning away, "it's rather sad and painful to me."

"Oh! sir," returned Smither anxiously, "you mustn't think that. Now that

he can't worry about things, he quite enjoys his life, really he does.

As I say to Cook, Mr. Timothy is more of a man than he ever was. You

see, when he's not walkin', or takin' his bath, he's eatin', and when

he's not eatin', he's sleepin'; and there it is. There isn't an ache or

a care about him anywhere."

"Well," said Soames, "there's something in that. I'll go down. By the

way, let me see his Will."

"I should have to take my time about that, sir; he keeps it under his

pillow, and he'd see me, while he's active."

"I only want to know if it's the one I made," said Soames; "you take a

look at its date some time, and let me know."

"Yes, sir; but I'm sure it's the same, because me and Cook witnessed,

you remember, and there's our names on it still, and we've only done it

once."

"Quite," said Soames. He did remember. Smither and Jane had been proper

witnesses, having been left nothing in the Will that they might have no

interest in Timothy's death. It had been--he fully admitted--an almost

improper precaution, but Timothy had wished it, and, after all, Aunt

Hester had provided for them amply.

"Very well," he said; "good-bye, Smither. Look after him, and if he

should say anything at any time, put it down, and let me know."

"Oh! yes, Mr. Soames; I'll be sure to do that. It's been such a

pleasant change to see you. Cook will be quite excited when I tell her."

Soames shook her hand and went down-stairs. He stood for fully two

minutes by the hat-stand whereon he had hung his hat so many times.

'So it all passes,' he was thinking; 'passes and begins again. Poor old

chap!' And he listened, if perchance the sound of Timothy trailing his

hobby-horse might come down the well of the stairs; or some ghost of an

old face show over the bannisters, and an old voice say: 'Why, it's dear

Soames, and we were only saying that we hadn't seen him for a week!'

Nothing--nothing! Just the scent of camphor, and dust-motes in a sunbeam

through the fanlight over the door. The little old house! A mausoleum!

And, turning on his heel, he went out, and caught his train.

V.--THE NATIVE HEATH

"His foot's upon his native heath,

His name's--Val Dartie."

With some such feeling did Val Dartie, in the fortieth year of his age,

set out that same Thursday morning very early from the old manor-house

he had taken on the north side of the Sussex Downs. His destination was

Newmarket, and he had not been there since the autumn of 1899, when he

stole over from Oxford for the Cambridgeshire. He paused at the door to

give his wife a kiss, and put a flask of port into his pocket.

"Don't overtire your leg, Val, and don't bet too much."

With the pressure of her chest against his own, and her eyes looking

into his, Val felt both leg and pocket safe. He should be moderate;

Holly was always right--she had a natural aptitude. It did not seem so

remarkable to him, perhaps, as it might to others, that--half Dartie as

he was--he should have been perfectly faithful to his young first cousin

during the twenty years since he married her romantically out in the

Boer War; and faithful without any feeling of sacrifice or boredom--she

was so quick, so slyly always a little in front of his mood. Being first

cousins they had decided, rather needlessly, to have no children; and,

though a little sallower, she had kept her looks, her slimness, and the

colour of her dark hair. Val particularly admired the life of her own

she carried on, besides carrying on his, and riding better every year.

She kept up her music, she read an awful lot--novels, poetry, all sorts

of stuff. Out on their farm in Cape colony she had looked after all

the "nigger" babies and women in a miraculous manner. She was, in

fact, clever; yet made no fuss about it, and had no "side." Though not

remarkable for humility, Val had come to have the feeling that she was

his superior, and he did not grudge it--a great tribute. It might be

noted that he never looked at Holly without her knowing of it, but that

she looked at him sometimes unawares.

He had kissed her in the porch because he should not be doing so on the

platform, though she was going to the station with him, to drive the car

back. Tanned and wrinkled by Colonial weather and the wiles inseparable

from horses, and handicapped by the leg which, weakened in the Boer War,

had probably saved his life in the War just past, Val was still much

as he had been in the days of his courtship; his smile as wide and

charming, his eyelashes, if anything, thicker and darker, his eyes

screwed up under them, as bright a grey, his freckles rather deeper, his

hair a little grizzled at the sides. He gave the impression of one who

has lived actively with horses in a sunny climate.

Twisting the car sharp round at the gate, he said:

"When is young Jon coming?"

"To-day."

"Is there anything you want for him? I could bring it down on Saturday."

"No; but you might come by the same train as Fleur--one-forty."

Val gave the Ford full rein; he still drove like a man in a new country

on bad roads, who refuses to compromise, and expects heaven at every

hole.

"That's a young woman who knows her way about," he said. "I say, has it

struck you?"

"Yes," said Holly.

"Uncle Soames and your Dad--bit awkward, isn't it?"

"She won't know, and he won't know, and nothing must be said, of course.

It's only for five days, Val."

"Stable secret! Righto!" If Holly thought it safe, it was. Glancing

slyly round at him, she said: "Did you notice how beautifully she asked

herself?"

"No!"

"Well, she did. What do you think of her, Val?"

"Pretty and clever; but she might run out at any corner if she got her

monkey up, I should say."

"I'm wondering," Holly murmured, "whether she is the modern young woman.

One feels at sea coming home into all this."

"You? You get the hang of things so quick."

Holly slid her hand into his coat-pocket.

"You keep one in the know," said Val encouraged. "What do you think of

that Belgian fellow, Profond?"

"I think he's rather 'a good devil.'"

Val grinned.

"He seems to me a queer fish for a friend of our family. In fact,

our family is in pretty queer waters, with Uncle Soames marrying a

Frenchwoman, and your Dad marrying Soames's first. Our grandfathers

would have had fits!"

"So would anybody's, my dear."

"This car," Val said suddenly, "wants rousing; she doesn't get her hind

legs under her uphill. I shall have to give her her head on the slope if

I'm to catch that train."

There was that about horses which had prevented him from ever really

sympathising with a car, and the running of the Ford under his guidance

compared with its running under that of Holly was always noticeable. He

caught the train.

"Take care going home; she'll throw you down if she can. Good-bye,

darling."

"Good-bye," called Holly, and kissed her hand.

In the train, after quarter of an hour's indecision between thoughts of

Holly, his morning paper, the look of the bright day, and his dim memory

of Newmarket, Val plunged into the recesses of a small square book,

all names, pedigrees, tap-roots, and notes about the make and shape

of horses. The Forsyte in him was bent on the acquisition of a certain

strain of blood, and he was subduing resolutely as yet the Dartie

hankering for a Nutter. On getting back to England, after the profitable

sale of his South African farm and stud, and observing that the sun

seldom shone, Val had said to himself: "I've absolutely got to have an

interest in life, or this country will give me the blues. Hunting's

not enough, I'll breed and I'll train." With just that extra pinch of

shrewdness and decision imparted by long residence in a new country, Val

had seen the weak point of modern breeding. They were all hypnotised by

fashion and high price. He should buy for looks, and let names go hang!

And here he was already, hypnotised by the prestige of a certain strain

of blood! Half-consciously, he thought: 'There's something in this

damned climate which makes one go round in a ring. All the same, I must

have a strain of Mayfly blood.'

In this mood he reached the Mecca of his hopes. It was one of those

quiet meetings favourable to such as wish to look into horses, rather

than into the mouths of bookmakers; and Val clung to the paddock. His

twenty years of Colonial life, divesting him of the dandyism in which he

had been bred, had left him the essential neatness of the horseman,

and given him a queer and rather blighting eye over what he called "the

silly haw-haw" of some Englishmen, the "flapping cockatoory" of

some English-women--Holly had none of that and Holly was his model.

Observant, quick, resourceful, Val went straight to the heart of a

transaction, a horse, a drink; and he was on his way to the heart of a

Mayfly filly, when a slow voice said at his elbow:

"Mr. Val Dartie? How's Mrs. Val Dartie? She's well, I hope." And he saw

beside him the Belgian he had met at his sister Imogen's.

"Prosper Profond--I met you at lunch," said the voice.

"How are you?" murmured Val.

"I'm very well," replied Monsieur Profond, smiling with a certain

inimitable slowness. "A good devil," Holly had called him. Well! He

looked a little like a devil, with his dark, clipped, pointed beard;

a sleepy one though, and good-humoured, with fine eyes, unexpectedly

intelligent.

"Here's a gentleman wants to know you--cousin of yours--Mr. George

Forsyde."

Val saw a large form, and a face clean-shaven, bull-like, a little

lowering, with sardonic humour bubbling behind a full grey eye; he

remembered it dimly from old days when he would dine with his father at

the Iseeum Club.

"I used to go racing with your father," George was saying: "How's the

stud? Like to buy one of my screws?"

Val grinned, to hide the sudden feeling that the bottom had fallen out

of breeding. They believed in nothing over here, not even in horses.

George Forsyte, Prosper Profond! The devil himself was not more

disillusioned than those two.

"Didn't know you were a racing man," he said to Monsieur Profond.

"I'm not. I don't care for it. I'm a yachtin' man. I don't care for

yachtin' either, but I like to see my friends. I've got some lunch,

Mr. Val Dartie, just a small lunch, if you'd like to 'ave some; not

much--just a small one--in my car."

"Thanks," said Val; "very good of you. I'll come along in about quarter

of an hour."

"Over there. Mr. Forsyde's comin'," and Monsieur Profond "poinded" with

a yellow-gloved finger; "small car, with a small lunch"; he moved on,

groomed, sleepy, and remote, George Forsyte following, neat, huge, and

with his jesting air.

Val remained gazing at the Mayfly filly. George Forsyte, of course,

was an old chap, but this Profond might be about his own age; Val felt

extremely young, as if the Mayfly filly were a toy at which those two

had laughed. The animal had lost reality.

"That 'small' mare"--he seemed to hear the voice of Monsieur

Profond--"what do you see in her?--we must all die!"

And George Forsyte, crony of his father, racing still! The Mayfly

strain--was it any better than any other? He might just as well have a

flutter with his money instead.

"No, by gum!" he muttered suddenly, "if it's no good breeding horses,

it's no good doing anything. What did I come for? I'll buy her."

He stood back and watched the ebb of the paddock visitors toward the

stand. Natty old chips, shrewd portly fellows, Jews, trainers looking

as if they had never been guilty of seeing a horse in their lives; tall,

flapping, languid women, or brisk, loud-voiced women; young men with an

air as if trying to take it seriously--two or three of them with only

one arm.

'Life over here's a game!' thought Val. 'Muffin bell rings, horses run,

money changes hands; ring again, run again, money changes back.'

But, alarmed at his own philosophy, he went to the paddock gate to watch

the Mayfly filly canter down. She moved well; and he made his way over

to the "small" car. The "small" lunch was the sort a man dreams of but

seldom gets; and when it was concluded Monsieur Profond walked back with

him to the paddock.

"Your wife's a nice woman," was his surprising remark.

"Nicest woman I know," returned Val dryly.

"Yes," said Monsieur Profond; "she has a nice face. I admire nice

women."

Val looked at him suspiciously, but something kindly and direct in the

heavy diabolism of his companion disarmed him for the moment.

"Any time you like to come on my yacht, I'll give her a small cruise."

"Thanks," said Val, in arms again, "she hates the sea."

"So do I," said Monsieur Profond.

"Then why do you yacht?"

The Belgian's eyes smiled. "Oh! I don't know. I've done everything; it's

the last thing I'm doin'."

"It must be d-d expensive. I should want more reason than that."

Monsieur Prosper Profond raised his eyebrows, and puffed out a heavy

lower lip.

"I'm an easy-goin' man," he said.

"Were you in the War?" asked Val.

"Ye-es. I've done that too. I was gassed; it was a small bit

unpleasant." He smiled with a deep and sleepy air of prosperity, as if

he had caught it from his name.

Whether his saying "small" when he ought to have said "little" was

genuine mistake or affectation Val could not decide; the fellow was

evidently capable of anything.

Among the ring of buyers round the Mayfly filly who had won her race,

Monsieur Profond said:

"You goin' to bid?"

Val nodded. With this sleepy Satan at his elbow, he felt in need of

faith. Though placed above the ultimate blows of Providence by the

forethought of a grand-father who had tied him up a thousand a year

to which was added the thousand a year tied up for Holly by her

grand-father, Val was not flush of capital that he could touch, having

spent most of what he had realised from his South African farm on his

establishment in Sussex. And very soon he was thinking: 'Dash it! she's

going beyond me!' His limit-six hundred-was exceeded; he dropped out of

the bidding. The Mayfly filly passed under the hammer at seven hundred

and fifty guineas. He was turning away vexed when the slow voice of

Monsieur Profond said in his ear:

"Well, I've bought that small filly, but I don't want her; you take her

and give her to your wife."

Val looked at the fellow with renewed suspicion, but the good humour in

his eyes was such that he really could not take offence.

"I made a small lot of money in the War," began Monsieur Profond in

answer to that look. "I 'ad armament shares. I like to give it away. I'm

always makin' money. I want very small lot myself. I like my friends to

'ave it."

"I'll buy her of you at the price you gave," said Val with sudden

resolution.

"No," said Monsieur Profond. "You take her. I don' want her."

"Hang it! one doesn't--"

"Why not?" smiled Monsieur Profond. "I'm a friend of your family."

"Seven hundred and fifty guineas is not a box of cigars," said Val

impatiently.

"All right; you keep her for me till I want her, and do what you like

with her."

"So long as she's yours," said Val. "I don't mind that."

"That's all right," murmured Monsieur Profond, and moved away.

Val watched; he might be "a good devil," but then again he might not. He

saw him rejoin George Forsyte, and thereafter saw him no more.

He spent those nights after racing at his mother's house in Green

Street.

Winifred Dartie at sixty-two was marvellously preserved, considering the

three-and-thirty years during which she had put up with Montague Dartie,

till almost happily released by a French staircase. It was to her a

vehement satisfaction to have her favourite son back from South Africa

after all this time, to feel him so little changed, and to have taken

a fancy to his wife. Winifred, who in the late seventies, before her

marriage, had been in the vanguard of freedom, pleasure, and fashion,

confessed her youth outclassed by the donzellas of the day. They seemed,

for instance, to regard marriage as an incident, and Winifred sometimes

regretted that she had not done the same; a second, third, fourth

incident might have secured her a partner of less dazzling inebriety;

though, after all, he had left her Val, Imogen, Maud, Benedict (almost a

colonel and unharmed by the War)--none of whom had been divorced as yet.

The steadiness of her children often amazed one who remembered their

father; but, as she was fond of believing, they were really all

Forsytes, favouring herself, with the exception, perhaps, of Imogen. Her

brother's "little girl" Fleur frankly puzzled Winifred. The child was as

restless as any of these modern young women--"She's a small flame in a

draught," Prosper Profond had said one day after dinner--but she did

not flap, or talk at the top of her voice. The steady Forsyteism in

Winifred's own character instinctively resented the feeling in the

air, the modern girl's habits and her motto: "All's much of a muchness!

Spend, to-morrow we shall be poor!" She found it a saving grace in Fleur

that, having set her heart on a thing, she had no change of heart until

she got it--though--what happened after, Fleur was, of course, too young

to have made evident. The child was a "very pretty little thing," too,

and quite a credit to take about, with her mother's French taste and

gift for wearing clothes; everybody turned to look at Fleur--great

consideration to Winifred, a lover of the style and distinction which

had so cruelly deceived her in the case of Montague Dartie.

In discussing her with Val, at breakfast on Saturday morning, Winifred

dwelt on the family skeleton.

"That little affair of your father-in-law and your Aunt Irene, Val--it's

old as the hills, of course, Fleur need know nothing about it--making

a fuss. Your Uncle Soames is very particular about that. So you'll be

careful."

"Yes! But it's dashed awkward--Holly's young half-brother is coming to

live with us while he learns farming. He's there already."

"Oh!" said Winifred. "That is a gaff! What is he like?"

"Only saw him once--at Robin Hill, when we were home in 1909; he was

naked and painted blue and yellow in stripes--a jolly little chap."

Winifred thought that "rather nice," and added comfortably: "Well,

Holly's sensible; she'll know how to deal with it. I shan't tell your

uncle. It'll only bother him. It's a great comfort to have you back, my

dear boy, now that I'm getting on."

"Getting on! Why! you're as young as ever. That chap Profond, Mother, is

he all right?"

"Prosper Profond! Oh! the most amusing man I know."

Val grunted, and recounted the story of the Mayfly filly.

"That's so like him," murmured Winifred. "He does all sorts of things."

"Well," said Val shrewdly, "our family haven't been too lucky with that

kind of cattle; they're too light-hearted for us."

It was true, and Winifred's blue study lasted a full minute before she

answered:

"Oh! well! He's a foreigner, Val; one must make allowances."

"All right, I'll use his filly and make it up to him, somehow."

And soon after he gave her his blessing, received a kiss, and left her

for his bookmaker's, the Iseeum Club, and Victoria station.

VI.--JON

Mrs. Val Dartie, after twenty years of South Africa, had fallen deeply

in love, fortunately with something of her own, for the object of her

passion was the prospect in front of her windows, the cool clear

light on the green Downs. It was England again, at last! England more

beautiful than she had dreamed. Chance had, in fact, guided the Val

Darties to a spot where the South Downs had real charm when the sun

shone. Holly had enough of her father's eye to apprehend the rare

quality of their outlines and chalky radiance; to go up there by the

ravine-like lane and wander along toward Chanctonbury or Amberley, was

still a delight which she hardly attempted to share with Val, whose

admiration of Nature was confused by a Forsyte's instinct for getting

something out of it, such as the condition of the turf for his horses'

exercise.

Driving the Ford home with a certain humouring, smoothness, she promised

herself that the first use she would make of Jon would be to take him up

there, and show him "the view" under this May-day sky.

She was looking forward to her young half-brother with a motherliness

not exhausted by Val. A three-day visit to Robin Hill, soon after their

arrival home, had yielded no sight of him--he was still at school; so

that her recollection, like Val's, was of a little sunny-haired boy,

striped blue and yellow, down by the pond.

Those three days at Robin Hill had been exciting, sad, embarrassing.

Memories of her dead brother, memories of Val's courtship; the ageing of

her father, not seen for twenty years, something funereal in his ironic

gentleness which did not escape one who had much subtle instinct;

above all, the presence of her stepmother, whom she could still

vaguely remember as the "lady in grey" of days when she was little and

grandfather alive and Mademoiselle Beauce so cross because that intruder

gave her music lessons--all these confused and tantalised a spirit which

had longed to find Robin Hill untroubled. But Holly was adept at keeping

things to herself, and all had seemed to go quite well.

Her father had kissed her when she left him, with lips which she was

sure had trembled.

"Well, my dear," he said, "the War hasn't changed Robin Hill, has it?

If only you could have brought Jolly back with you! I say, can you

stand this spiritualistic racket? When the oak-tree dies, it dies, I'm

afraid."

From the warmth of her embrace he probably divined that he had let the

cat out of the bag, for he rode off at once on irony.

"Spiritualism--queer word, when the more they manifest the more they

prove that they've got hold of matter."

"How?" said Holly.

"Why! Look at their photographs of auric presences. You must have

something material for light and shade to fall on before you can take

a photograph. No, it'll end in our calling all matter spirit, or all

spirit matter--I don't know which."

"But don't you believe in survival, Dad?"

Jolyon had looked at her, and the sad whimsicality of his face impressed

her deeply.

"Well, my dear, I should like to get something out of death. I've been

looking into it a bit. But for the life of me I can't find anything that

telepathy, sub-consciousness, and emanation from the storehouse of

this world can't account for just as well. Wish I could! Wishes father

thought but they don't breed evidence." Holly had pressed her lips again

to his forehead with the feeling that it confirmed his theory that all

matter was becoming spirit--his brow felt, somehow, so insubstantial.

But the most poignant memory of that little visit had been watching,

unobserved, her stepmother reading to herself a letter from Jon. It

was--she decided--the prettiest sight she had ever seen. Irene, lost as

it were in the letter of her boy, stood at a window where the light fell

on her face and her fine grey hair; her lips were moving, smiling, her

dark eyes laughing, dancing, and the hand which did not hold the letter

was pressed against her breast. Holly withdrew as from a vision of

perfect love, convinced that Jon must be nice.

When she saw him coming out of the station with a kit-bag in either

hand, she was confirmed in her predisposition. He was a little like

Jolly, that long-lost idol of her childhood, but eager-looking and less

formal, with deeper eyes and brighter-coloured hair, for he wore no hat;

altogether a very interesting "little" brother!

His tentative politeness charmed one who was accustomed to assurance in

the youthful manner; he was disturbed because she was to drive him home,

instead of his driving her. Shouldn't he have a shot? They hadn't a car

at Robin Hill since the War, of course, and he had only driven once, and

landed up a bank, so she oughtn't to mind his trying. His laugh, soft

and infectious, was very attractive, though that word, she had heard,

was now quite old-fashioned. When they reached the house he pulled out

a crumpled letter which she read while he was washing--a quite short

letter, which must have cost her father many a pang to write.

"MY DEAR,

"You and Val will not forget, I trust, that Jon knows nothing of family

history. His mother and I think he is too young at present. The boy is

very dear, and the apple of her eye. Verbum sapientibus,

"Your loving father,

"J. F."

That was all; but it renewed in Holly an uneasy regret that Fleur was

coming.

After tea she fulfilled that promise to herself and took Jon up the

hill. They had a long talk, sitting above an old chalk-pit grown over

with brambles and goosepenny. Milkwort and liverwort starred the green

slope, the larks sang, and thrushes in the brake, and now and then a

gull flighting inland would wheel very white against the paling sky,

where the vague moon was coming up. Delicious fragrance came to them, as

if little invisible creatures were running and treading scent out of the

blades of grass.

Jon, who had fallen silent, said rather suddenly:

"I say, this is wonderful! There's no fat on it at all. Gull's flight

and sheep-bells."

"'Gull's flight and sheep-bells'! You're a poet, my dear!"

Jon sighed.

"Oh, Golly! No go!"

"Try! I used to at your age."

"Did you? Mother says 'try' too; but I'm so rotten. Have you any of

yours for me to see?"

"My dear," Holly murmured, "I've been married nineteen years. I only

wrote verses when I wanted to be."

"Oh!" said Jon, and turned over on his face: the one cheek she could see

was a charming colour. Was Jon "touched in the wind," then, as Val would

have called it? Already? But, if so, all the better, he would take no

notice of young Fleur. Besides, on Monday he would begin his farming.

And she smiled. Was it Burns who followed the plough, or only Piers

Plowman? Nearly every young man and most young women seemed to be poets

now, judging from the number of their books she had read out in South

Africa, importing them from Hatchus and Bumphards; and quite good--oh!

quite; much better than she had been herself! But then poetry had only

really come in since her day--with motor-cars. Another long talk after

dinner over a wood fire in the low hall, and there seemed little left to

know about Jon except anything of real importance. Holly parted from him

at his bedroom door, having seen twice over that he had everything, with

the conviction that she would love him, and Val would like him. He

was eager, but did not gush; he was a splendid listener, sympathetic,

reticent about himself. He evidently loved their father, and adored his

mother. He liked riding, rowing, and fencing better than games. He saved

moths from candles, and couldn't bear spiders, but put them out of doors

in screws of paper sooner than kill them. In a word, he was amiable. She

went to sleep, thinking that he would suffer horribly if anybody hurt

him; but who would hurt him?

Jon, on the other hand, sat awake at his window with a bit of paper and

a pencil, writing his first "real poem" by the light of a candle because

there was not enough moon to see by, only enough to make the night seem

fluttery and as if engraved on silver. Just the night for Fleur to walk,

and turn her eyes, and lead on-over the hills and far away. And Jon,

deeply furrowed in his ingenuous brow, made marks on the paper and

rubbed them out and wrote them in again, and did all that was necessary

for the completion of a work of art; and he had a feeling such as the

winds of Spring must have, trying their first songs among the coming

blossom. Jon was one of those boys (not many) in whom a home-trained

love of beauty had survived school life. He had had to keep it to

himself, of course, so that not even the drawing-master knew of it; but

it was there, fastidious and clear within him. And his poem seemed to

him as lame and stilted as the night was winged. But he kept it, all the

same. It was a "beast," but better than nothing as an expression of the

inexpressible. And he thought with a sort of discomfiture: 'I shan't be

able to show it to Mother.' He slept terribly well, when he did sleep,

overwhelmed by novelty.

VII.--FLEUR

To avoid the awkwardness of questions which could not be answered, all

that had been told Jon was:

"There's a girl coming down with Val for the week-end."

For the same reason, all that had been told Fleur was: "We've got a

youngster staying with us."

The two yearlings, as Val called them in his thoughts, met therefore in

a manner which for unpreparedness left nothing to be desired. They were

thus introduced by Holly:

"This is Jon, my little brother; Fleur's a cousin of ours, Jon."

Jon, who was coming in through a French window out of strong sunlight,

was so confounded by the providential nature of this miracle, that he

had time to hear Fleur say calmly: "Oh, how do you do?" as if he had

never seen her, and to understand dimly from the quickest imaginable

little movement of her head that he never had seen her. He bowed

therefore over her hand in an intoxicated manner, and became more silent

than the grave. He knew better than to speak. Once in his early life,

surprised reading by a nightlight, he had said fatuously "I was just

turning over the leaves, Mum," and his mother had replied: "Jon, never

tell stories, because of your face nobody will ever believe them."

The saying had permanently undermined the confidence necessary to the

success of spoken untruth. He listened therefore to Fleur's swift and

rapt allusions to the jolliness of everything, plied her with scones and

jam, and got away as soon as might be. They say that in delirium tremens

you see a fixed object, preferably dark, which suddenly changes shape

and position. Jon saw the fixed object; it had dark eyes and passably

dark hair, and changed its position, but never its shape. The

knowledge that between him and that object there was already a secret

understanding (however impossible to understand) thrilled him so that

he waited feverishly, and began to copy out his poem--which of course

he would never dare to--show her--till the sound of horses' hoofs roused

him, and, leaning from his window, he saw her riding forth with Val. It

was clear that she wasted no time, but the sight filled him with grief.

He wasted his. If he had not bolted, in his fearful ecstasy, he might

have been asked to go too. And from his window he sat and watched them

disappear, appear again in the chine of the road, vanish, and emerge

once more for a minute clear on the outline of the Down. 'Silly brute!'

he thought; 'I always miss my chances.'

Why couldn't he be self-confident and ready? And, leaning his chin on

his hands, he imagined the ride he might have had with her. A week-end

was but a week-end, and he had missed three hours of it. Did he know any

one except himself who would have been such a flat? He did not.

He dressed for dinner early, and was first down. He would miss no more.

But he missed Fleur, who came down last. He sat opposite her at dinner,

and it was terrible--impossible to say anything for fear of saying

the wrong thing, impossible to keep his eyes fixed on her in the only

natural way; in sum, impossible to treat normally one with whom in fancy

he had already been over the hills and far away; conscious, too, all the

time, that he must seem to her, to all of them, a dumb gawk. Yes, it was

terrible! And she was talking so well--swooping with swift wing this

way and that. Wonderful how she had learned an art which he found so

disgustingly difficult. She must think him hopeless indeed!

His sister's eyes, fixed on him with a certain astonishment, obliged him

at last to look at Fleur; but instantly her eyes, very wide and eager,

seeming to say, "Oh! for goodness' sake!" obliged him to look at Val,

where a grin obliged him to look at his cutlet--that, at least, had no

eyes, and no grin, and he ate it hastily.

"Jon is going to be a farmer," he heard Holly say; "a farmer and a

poet."

He glanced up reproachfully, caught the comic lift of her eyebrow just

like their father's, laughed, and felt better.

Val recounted the incident of Monsieur Prosper Profond; nothing could

have been more favourable, for, in relating it, he regarded Holly, who

in turn regarded him, while Fleur seemed to be regarding with a slight

frown some thought of her own, and Jon was really free to look at her at

last. She had on a white frock, very simple and well made; her arms were

bare, and her hair had a white rose in it. In just that swift moment of

free vision, after such intense discomfort, Jon saw her sublimated, as

one sees in the dark a slender white fruit-tree; caught her like a verse

of poetry flashed before the eyes of the mind, or a tune which floats

out in the distance and dies. He wondered giddily how old she was--she

seemed so much more self-possessed and experienced than himself. Why

mustn't he say they had met? He remembered suddenly his mother's face;

puzzled, hurt-looking, when she answered: "Yes, they're relations,

but we don't know them." Impossible that his mother, who loved beauty,

should not admire Fleur if she did know her.

Alone with Val after dinner, he sipped port deferentially and answered

the advances of this new-found brother-in-law. As to riding (always the

first consideration with Val) he could have the young chestnut, saddle

and unsaddle it himself, and generally look after it when he brought it

in. Jon said he was accustomed to all that at home, and saw that he had

gone up one in his host's estimation.

"Fleur," said Val, "can't ride much yet, but she's keen. Of course, her

father doesn't know a horse from a cart-wheel. Does your Dad ride?"

"He used to; but now he's--you know, he's--" He stopped, so hating the

word "old." His father was old, and yet not old; no--never!

"Quite," muttered Val. "I used to know your brother up at Oxford, ages

ago, the one who died in the Boer War. We had a fight in New College

Gardens. That was a queer business," he added, musing; "a good deal came

out of it."

Jon's eyes opened wide; all was pushing him toward historical research,

when his sister's voice said gently from the doorway:

"Come along, you two," and he rose, his heart pushing him toward

something far more modern.

Fleur having declared that it was "simply too wonderful to stay

indoors," they all went out. Moonlight was frosting the dew, and an old

sundial threw a long shadow. Two box hedges at right angles, dark

and square, barred off the orchard. Fleur turned through that angled

opening.

"Come on!" she called. Jon glanced at the others, and followed. She was

running among the trees like a ghost. All was lovely and foamlike above

her, and there was a scent of old trunks, and of nettles. She vanished.

He thought he had lost her, then almost ran into her standing quite

still.

"Isn't it jolly?" she cried, and Jon answered:

"Rather!"

She reached up, twisted off a blossom and, twirling it in her fingers,

said:

"I suppose I can call you Jon?"

"I should think so just."

"All right! But you know there's a feud between our families?"

Jon stammered: "Feud? Why?"

"It's ever so romantic and silly. That's why I pretended we hadn't

met. Shall we get up early to-morrow morning and go for a walk before

breakfast and have it out? I hate being slow about things, don't you?"

Jon murmured a rapturous assent.

"Six o'clock, then. I think your mother's beautiful"

Jon said fervently: "Yes, she is."

"I love all kinds of beauty," went on Fleur, "when it's exciting. I

don't like Greek things a bit."

"What! Not Euripides?"

"Euripides? Oh! no, I can't bear Greek plays; they're so long. I think

beauty's always swift. I like to look at one picture, for instance, and

then run off. I can't bear a lot of things together. Look!" She held

up her blossom in the moonlight. "That's better than all the orchard, I

think."

And, suddenly, with her other hand she caught Jon's.

"Of all things in the world, don't you think caution's the most awful?

Smell the moonlight!"

She thrust the blossom against his face; Jon agreed giddily that of all

things in the world caution was the worst, and bending over, kissed the

hand which held his.

"That's nice and old-fashioned," said Fleur calmly. "You're frightfully

silent, Jon. Still I like silence when it's swift." She let go his hand.

"Did you think I dropped my handkerchief on purpose?"

"No!" cried Jon, intensely shocked.

"Well, I did, of course. Let's get back, or they'll think we're doing

this on purpose too." And again she ran like a ghost among the trees.

Jon followed, with love in his heart, Spring in his heart, and over all

the moonlit white unearthly blossom. They came out where they had gone

in, Fleur walking demurely.

"It's quite wonderful in there," she said dreamily to Holly.

Jon preserved silence, hoping against hope that she might be thinking it

swift.

She bade him a casual and demure good-night, which made him think he had

been dreaming....

In her bedroom Fleur had flung off her gown, and, wrapped in a shapeless

garment, with the white flower still in her hair, she looked like a

mousme, sitting cross-legged on her bed, writing by candlelight.

"DEAREST CHERRY,

"I believe I'm in love. I've got it in the neck, only the feeling is

really lower down. He's a second cousin-such a child, about six months

older and ten years younger than I am. Boys always fall in love with

their seniors, and girls with their juniors or with old men of forty.

Don't laugh, but his eyes are the truest things I ever saw; and he's

quite divinely silent! We had a most romantic first meeting in London

under the Vospovitch Juno. And now he's sleeping in the next room and

the moonlight's on the blossom; and to-morrow morning, before anybody's

awake, we're going to walk off into Down fairyland. There's a feud

between our families, which makes it really exciting. Yes! and I may

have to use subterfuge and come on you for invitations--if so, you'll

know why! My father doesn't want us to know each other, but I can't help

that. Life's too short. He's got the most beautiful mother, with lovely

silvery hair and a young face with dark eyes. I'm staying with his

sister--who married my cousin; it's all mixed up, but I mean to pump

her to-morrow. We've often talked about love being a spoil-sport; well,

that's all tosh, it's the beginning of sport, and the sooner you feel

it, my dear, the better for you.

"Jon (not simplified spelling, but short for Jolyon, which is a name in

my family, they say) is the sort that lights up and goes out; about five

feet ten, still growing, and I believe he's going to be a poet. If

you laugh at me I've done with you forever. I perceive all sorts of

difficulties, but you know when I really want a thing I get it. One of

the chief effects of love is that you see the air sort of inhabited,

like seeing a face in the moon; and you feel--you feel dancey and soft

at the same time, with a funny sensation--like a continual first sniff

of orange--blossom--Just above your stays. This is my first, and I feel

as if it were going to be my last, which is absurd, of course, by all

the laws of Nature and morality. If you mock me I will smite you, and

if you tell anybody I will never forgive you. So much so, that I almost

don't think I'll send this letter. Anyway, I'll sleep over it. So

good-night, my Cherry--oh!

"Your,

"FLEUR."

VIII.--IDYLL ON GRASS

When those two young Forsytes emerged from the chine lane, and set their

faces east toward the sun, there was not a cloud in heaven, and the

Downs were dewy. They had come at a good bat up the slope and were a

little out of breath; if they had anything to say they did not say it,

but marched in the early awkwardness of unbreakfasted morning under the

songs of the larks. The stealing out had been fun, but with the freedom

of the tops the sense of conspiracy ceased, and gave place to dumbness.

"We've made one blooming error," said Fleur, when they had gone half a

mile. "I'm hungry."

Jon produced a stick of chocolate. They shared it and their tongues

were loosened. They discussed the nature of their homes and previous

existences, which had a kind of fascinating unreality up on that lonely

height. There remained but one thing solid in Jon's past--his mother;

but one thing solid in Fleur's--her father; and of these figures, as

though seen in the distance with disapproving faces, they spoke little.

The Down dipped and rose again toward Chanctonbury Ring; a sparkle of

far sea came into view, a sparrow-hawk hovered in the sun's eye so that

the blood-nourished brown of his wings gleamed nearly red. Jon had a

passion for birds, and an aptitude for sitting very still to watch them;

keen-sighted, and with a memory for what interested him, on birds he was

almost worth listening to. But in Chanctonbury Ring there were none--its

great beech temple was empty of life, and almost chilly at this early

hour; they came out willingly again into the sun on the far side. It was

Fleur's turn now. She spoke of dogs, and the way people treated them. It

was wicked to keep them on chains! She would like to flog people who did

that. Jon was astonished to find her so humanitarian. She knew a dog,

it seemed, which some farmer near her home kept chained up at the end of

his chicken run, in all weathers, till it had almost lost its voice from

barking!

"And the misery is," she said vehemently, "that if the poor thing didn't

bark at every one who passes it wouldn't be kept there. I do think men

are cunning brutes. I've let it go twice, on the sly; it's nearly bitten

me both times, and then it goes simply mad with joy; but it always runs

back home at last, and they chain it up again. If I had my way, I'd

chain that man up." Jon saw her teeth and her eyes gleam. "I'd brand him

on his forehead with the word 'Brute'; that would teach him!"

Jon agreed that it would be a good remedy.

"It's their sense of property," he said, "which makes people chain

things. The last generation thought of nothing but property; and that's

why there was the War."

"Oh!" said Fleur, "I never thought of that. Your people and mine

quarrelled about property. And anyway we've all got it--at least, I

suppose your people have."

"Oh! yes, luckily; I don't suppose I shall be any good at making money."

"If you were, I don't believe I should like you."

Jon slipped his hand tremulously under her arm. Fleur looked straight

before her and chanted:

"Jon, Jon, the farmer's son, Stole a pig, and away he run!"

Jon's arm crept round her waist.

"This is rather sudden," said Fleur calmly; "do you often do it?"

Jon dropped his arm. But when she laughed his arm stole back again; and

Fleur began to sing:

"O who will oer the downs so free, O who will with me ride? O who will

up and follow me---"

"Sing, Jon!"

Jon sang. The larks joined in, sheep-bells, and an early morning church

far away over in Steyning. They went on from tune to tune, till Fleur

said:

"My God! I am hungry now!"

"Oh! I am sorry!"

She looked round into his face.

"Jon, you're rather a darling."

And she pressed his hand against her waist. Jon almost reeled from

happiness. A yellow-and-white dog coursing a hare startled them apart.

They watched the two vanish down the slope, till Fleur said with a sigh:

"He'll never catch it, thank goodness! What's the time? Mine's stopped.

I never wound it."

Jon looked at his watch. "By Jove!" he said, "mine's stopped; too."

They walked on again, but only hand in hand.

"If the grass is dry," said Fleur, "let's sit down for half a minute."

Jon took off his coat, and they shared it.

"Smell! Actually wild thyme!"

With his arm round her waist again, they sat some minutes in silence.

"We are goats!" cried Fleur, jumping up; "we shall be most fearfully

late, and look so silly, and put them on their guard. Look here, Jon We

only came out to get an appetite for breakfast, and lost our way. See?"

"Yes," said Jon.

"It's serious; there'll be a stopper put on us. Are you a good liar?"

"I believe not very; but I can try."

Fleur frowned.

"You know," she said, "I realize that they don't mean us to be friends."

"Why not?"

"I told you why."

"But that's silly."

"Yes; but you don't know my father!"

"I suppose he's fearfully fond of you."

"You see, I'm an only child. And so are you--of your mother. Isn't it

a bore? There's so much expected of one. By the time they've done

expecting, one's as good as dead."

"Yes," muttered Jon, "life's beastly short. One wants to live forever,

and know everything."

"And love everybody?"

"No," cried Jon; "I only want to love once--you."

"Indeed! You're coming on! Oh! Look! There's the chalk-pit; we can't be

very far now. Let's run."

Jon followed, wondering fearfully if he had offended her.

The chalk-pit was full of sunshine and the murmuration of bees. Fleur

flung back her hair.

"Well," she said, "in case of accidents, you may give me one kiss, Jon,"

and she pushed her cheek forward. With ecstasy he kissed that hot soft

cheek.

"Now, remember! We lost our way; and leave it to me as much as you can.

I'm going to be rather beastly to you; it's safer; try and be beastly to

me!"

Jon shook his head. "That's impossible."

"Just to please me; till five o'clock, at all events."

"Anybody will be able to see through it," said Jon gloomily.

"Well, do your best. Look! There they are! Wave your hat! Oh! you

haven't got one. Well, I'll cooee! Get a little away from me, and look

sulky."

Five minutes later, entering the house and doing his utmost to look

sulky, Jon heard her clear voice in the dining-room:

"Oh! I'm simply ravenous! He's going to be a farmer--and he loses his

way! The boy's an idiot!"

IX. GOYA

Lunch was over and Soames mounted to the picture-gallery in his house

near Mapleduram. He had what Annette called "a grief." Fleur was not

yet home. She had been expected on Wednesday; had wired that it would be

Friday; and again on Friday that it would be Sunday afternoon; and here

were her aunt, and her cousins the Cardigans, and this fellow Profond,

and everything flat as a pancake for the want of her. He stood before

his Gauguin--sorest point of his collection. He had bought the ugly

great thing with two early Matisses before the War, because there was

such a fuss about those Post-Impressionist chaps. He was wondering

whether Profond would take them off his hands--the fellow seemed not to

know what to do with his money--when he heard his sister's voice say: "I

think that's a horrid thing, Soames," and saw that Winifred had followed

him up.

"Oh! you do?" he said dryly; "I gave five hundred for it."

"Fancy! Women aren't made like that even if they are black."

Soames uttered a glum laugh. "You didn't come up to tell me that."

"No. Do you know that Jolyon's boy is staying with Val and his wife?"

Soames spun round.

"What?"

"Yes," drawled Winifred; "he's gone to live with them there while he

learns farming."

Soames had turned away, but her voice pursued him as he walked up and

down. "I warned Val that neither of them was to be spoken to about old

matters."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

Winifred shrugged her substantial shoulders.

"Fleur does what she likes. You've always spoiled her. Besides, my dear

boy, what's the harm?"

"The harm!" muttered Soames. "Why, she--" he checked himself. The Juno,

the handkerchief, Fleur's eyes, her questions, and now this delay in

her return--the symptoms seemed to him so sinister that, faithful to his

nature, he could not part with them.

"I think you take too much care," said Winifred. "If I were you, I

should tell her of that old matter. It's no good thinking that girls in

these days are as they used to be. Where they pick up their knowledge I

can't tell, but they seem to know everything."

Over Soames' face, closely composed, passed a sort of spasm, and

Winifred added hastily:

"If you don't like to speak of it, I could for you."

Soames shook his head. Unless there was absolute necessity the thought

that his adored daughter should learn of that old scandal hurt his pride

too much.

"No," he said, "not yet. Never if I can help it.

"Nonsense, my dear. Think what people are!"

"Twenty years is a long time," muttered Soames. "Outside our family,

who's likely to remember?"

Winifred was silenced. She inclined more and more to that peace and

quietness of which Montague Dartie had deprived her in her youth. And,

since pictures always depressed her, she soon went down again.

Soames passed into the corner where, side by side, hung his real Goya

and the copy of the fresco "La Vendimia." His acquisition of the real

Goya rather beautifully illustrated the cobweb of vested interests and

passions which mesh the bright-winged fly of human life. The real

Goya's noble owner's ancestor had come into possession of it during

some Spanish war--it was in a word loot. The noble owner had remained

in ignorance of its value until in the nineties an enterprising critic

discovered that a Spanish painter named Goya was a genius. It was only

a fair Goya, but almost unique in England, and the noble owner became a

marked man. Having many possessions and that aristocratic culture

which, independent of mere sensuous enjoyment, is founded on the sounder

principle that one must know everything and be fearfully interested in

life, he had fully intended to keep an article which contributed to his

reputation while he was alive, and to leave it to the nation after

he was dead. Fortunately for Soames, the House of Lords was violently

attacked in 1909, and the noble owner became alarmed and angry. 'If,'

he said to himself, 'they think they can have it both ways they are very

much mistaken. So long as they leave me in quiet enjoyment the nation

can have some of my pictures at my death. But if the nation is going to

bait me, and rob me like this, I'm damned if I won't sell the lot. They

can't have my private property and my public spirit-both.' He brooded

in this fashion for several months till one morning, after reading the

speech of a certain statesman, he telegraphed to his agent to come

down and bring Bodkin. On going over the collection Bodkin, than whose

opinion on market values none was more sought, pronounced that with a

free hand to sell to America, Germany, and other places where there was

an interest in art, a lot more money could be made than by selling in

England. The noble owner's public spirit--he said--was well known but

the pictures were unique. The noble owner put this opinion in his pipe

and smoked it for a year. At the end of that time he read another speech

by the same statesman, and telegraphed to his agents: "Give Bodkin a

free hand." It was at this juncture that Bodkin conceived the idea which

saved the Goya and two other unique pictures for the native country

of the noble owner. With one hand Bodkin proffered the pictures to

the foreign market, with the other he formed a list of private British

collectors. Having obtained what he considered the highest possible

bids from across the seas, he submitted pictures and bids to the private

British collectors, and invited them, of their public spirit, to

outbid. In three instances (including the Goya) out of twenty-one he was

successful. And why? One of the private collectors made buttons--he

had made so many that he desired that his wife should be called Lady

"Buttons." He therefore bought a unique picture at great cost, and

gave it to the nation. It was "part," his friends said, "of his general

game." The second of the private collectors was an Americophobe, and

bought an unique picture to "spite the damned Yanks." The third of

the private collectors was Soames, who--more sober than either of the,

others--bought after a visit to Madrid, because he was certain that Goya

was still on the up grade. Goya was not booming at the moment, but he

would come again; and, looking at that portrait, Hogarthian, Manetesque

in its directness, but with its own queer sharp beauty of paint, he was

perfectly satisfied still that he had made no error, heavy though the

price had been--heaviest he had ever paid. And next to it was hanging

the copy of "La Vendimia." There she was--the little wretch--looking back

at him in her dreamy mood, the mood he loved best because he felt so

much safer when she looked like that.

He was still gazing when the scent of a cigar impinged on his nostrils,

and a voice said:

"Well, Mr. Forsyde, what you goin' to do with this small lot?"

That Belgian chap, whose mother--as if Flemish blood were not enough--had

been Armenian! Subduing a natural irritation, he said:

"Are you a judge of pictures?"

"Well, I've got a few myself."

"Any Post-Impressionists?"

"Ye-es, I rather like them."

"What do you think of this?" said Soames, pointing to the Gauguin.

Monsieur Profond protruded his lower lip and short pointed beard.

"Rather fine, I think," he said; "do you want to sell it?"

Soames checked his instinctive "Not particularly"--he would not chaffer

with this alien.

"Yes," he said.

"What do you want for it?"

"What I gave."

"All right," said Monsieur Profond. "I'll be glad to take that small

picture. Post-Impressionists--they're awful dead, but they're amusin'. I

don' care for pictures much, but I've got some, just a small lot."

"What do you care for?"

Monsieur Profond shrugged his shoulders.

"Life's awful like a lot of monkeys scramblin' for empty nuts."

"You're young," said Soames. If the fellow must make a generalization,

he needn't suggest that the forms of property lacked solidity!

"I don' worry," replied Monsieur Profond smiling; "we're born, and we

die. Half the world's starvin'. I feed a small lot of babies out in my

mother's country; but what's the use? Might as well throw my money in

the river."

Soames looked at him, and turned back toward his Goya. He didn't know

what the fellow wanted.

"What shall I make my cheque for?" pursued Monsieur Profond.

"Five hundred," said Soames shortly; "but I don't want you to take it if

you don't care for it more than that."

"That's all right," said Monsieur Profond; "I'll be 'appy to 'ave that

picture."

He wrote a cheque with a fountain-pen heavily chased with gold. Soames

watched the process uneasily. How on earth had the fellow known that he

wanted to sell that picture? Monsieur Profond held out the cheque.

"The English are awful funny about pictures," he said. "So are the

French, so are my people. They're all awful funny."

"I don't understand you," said Soames stiffly.

"It's like hats," said Monsieur Profond enigmatically, "small or large,

turnin' up or down--just the fashion. Awful funny." And, smiling, he

drifted out of the gallery again, blue and solid like the smoke of his

excellent cigar.

Soames had taken the cheque, feeling as if the intrinsic value of

ownership had been called in question. 'He's a cosmopolitan,' he

thought, watching Profond emerge from under the verandah with Annette,

and saunter down the lawn toward the river. What his wife saw in the

fellow he didn't know, unless it was that he could speak her language;

and there passed in Soames what Monsieur Profond would have called a

"small doubt" whether Annette was not too handsome to be walking with

any one so "cosmopolitan." Even at that distance he could see the blue

fumes from Profond's cigar wreath out in the quiet sunlight; and his

grey buckskin shoes, and his grey hat--the fellow was a dandy! And he

could see the quick turn of his wife's head, so very straight on her

desirable neck and shoulders. That turn of her neck always seemed to him

a little too showy, and in the "Queen of all I survey" manner--not quite

distinguished. He watched them walk along the path at the bottom of the

garden. A young man in flannels joined them down there--a Sunday caller

no doubt, from up the river. He went back to his Goya. He was still

staring at that replica of Fleur, and worrying over Winifred's news,

when his wife's voice said:

"Mr. Michael Mont, Soames. You invited him to see your pictures."

There was the cheerful young man of the Gallery off Cork Street!

"Turned up, you see, sir; I live only four miles from Pangbourne. Jolly

day, isn't it?"

Confronted with the results of his expansiveness, Soames scrutinized

his visitor. The young man's mouth was excessively large and curly--he

seemed always grinning. Why didn't he grow the rest of those idiotic

little moustaches, which made him look like a music-hall buffoon? What

on earth were young men about, deliberately lowering their class with

these tooth-brushes, or little slug whiskers? Ugh! Affected young

idiots! In other respects he was presentable, and his flannels very

clean.

"Happy to see you!" he said.

The young man, who had been turning his head from side to side, became

transfixed. "I say!" he said, "'some' picture!"

Soames saw, with mixed sensations, that he had addressed the remark to

the Goya copy.

"Yes," he said dryly, "that's not a Goya. It's a copy. I had it painted

because it reminded me of my daughter."

"By Jove! I thought I knew the face, sir. Is she here?"

The frankness of his interest almost disarmed Soames.

"She'll be in after tea," he said. "Shall we go round the pictures?"

And Soames began that round which never tired him. He had not

anticipated much intelligence from one who had mistaken a copy for an

original, but as they passed from section to section, period to period,

he was startled by the young man's frank and relevant remarks. Natively

shrewd himself, and even sensuous beneath his mask, Soames had not spent

thirty-eight years over his one hobby without knowing something more

about pictures than their market values. He was, as it were, the missing

link between the artist and the commercial public. Art for art's sake

and all that, of course, was cant. But aesthetics and good taste were

necessary. The appreciation of enough persons of good taste was what

gave a work of art its permanent market value, or in other words made

it "a work of art." There was no real cleavage. And he was sufficiently

accustomed to sheep-like and unseeing visitors, to be intrigued by one

who did not hesitate to say of Mauve: "Good old haystacks!" or of James

Maris: "Didn't he just paint and paper 'em! Mathew was the real swell,

sir; you could dig into his surfaces!" It was after the young man had

whistled before a Whistler, with the words, "D'you think he ever really

saw a naked woman, sir?" that Soames remarked:

"What are you, Mr. Mont, if I may ask?"

"I, sir? I was going to be a painter, but the War knocked that. Then in

the trenches, you know, I used to dream of the Stock Exchange, snug and

warm and just noisy enough. But the Peace knocked that, shares seem off,

don't they? I've only been demobbed about a year. What do you recommend,

sir?"

"Have you got money?"

"Well," answered the young man, "I've got a father; I kept him alive

during the War, so he's bound to keep me alive now. Though, of course,

there's the question whether he ought to be allowed to hang on to his

property. What do you think about that, sir?"

Soames, pale and defensive, smiled.

"The old man has fits when I tell him he may have to work yet. He's got

land, you know; it's a fatal disease."

"This is my real Goya," said Soames dryly.

"By George! He was a swell. I saw a Goya in Munich once that bowled me

middle stump. A most evil-looking old woman in the most gorgeous lace.

He made no compromise with the public taste. That old boy was 'some'

explosive; he must have smashed up a lot of convention in his day.

Couldn't he just paint! He makes Velasquez stiff, don't you think?"

"I have no Velasquez," said Soames.

The young man stared. "No," he said; "only nations or profiteers can

afford him, I suppose. I say, why shouldn't all the bankrupt nations

sell their Velasquez and Titians and other swells to the profiteers by

force, and then pass a law that any one who holds a picture by an Old

Master--see schedule--must hang it in a public gallery? There seems

something in that."

"Shall we go down to tea?" said Soames.

The young man's ears seemed to droop on his skull. 'He's not dense,'

thought Soames, following him off the premises.

Goya, with his satiric and surpassing precision, his original "line,"

and the daring of his light and shade, could have reproduced to

admiration the group assembled round Annette's tea-tray in the inglenook

below. He alone, perhaps, of painters would have done justice to the

sunlight filtering through a screen of creeper, to the lovely pallor of

brass, the old cut glasses, the thin slices of lemon in pale amber tea;

justice to Annette in her black lacey dress; there was something of the

fair Spaniard in her beauty, though it lacked the spirituality of that

rare type; to Winifred's grey-haired, corseted solidity; to Soames, of

a certain grey and flat-cheeked distinction; to the vivacious Michael

Mont, pointed in ear and eye; to Imogen, dark, luscious of glance,

growing a little stout; to Prosper Profond, with his expression as

who should say, "Well, Mr. Goya, what's the use of paintin' this small

party?" finally, to Jack Cardigan, with his shining stare and tanned

sanguinity betraying the moving principle: "I'm English, and I live to

be fit."

Curious, by the way, that Imogen, who as a girl had declared solemnly

one day at Timothy's that she would never marry a good man--they were so

dull--should have married Jack Cardigan, in whom health had so destroyed

all traces of original sin, that she might have retired to rest with ten

thousand other Englishmen without knowing the difference from the one

she had chosen to repose beside. "Oh!" she would say of him, in her

"amusing" way, "Jack keeps himself so fearfully fit; he's never had

a day's illness in his life. He went right through the War without a

finger-ache. You really can't imagine how fit he is!" Indeed, he was

so "fit" that he couldn't see when she was flirting, which was such a

comfort in a way. All the same she was quite fond of him, so far as one

could be of a sports-machine, and of the two little Cardigans made after

his pattern. Her eyes just then were comparing him maliciously with

Prosper Profond. There was no "small" sport or game which Monsieur

Profond had not played at too, it seemed, from skittles to

tarpon-fishing, and worn out every one. Imogen would sometimes wish that

they had worn out Jack, who continued to play at them and talk of them

with the simple zeal of a school-girl learning hockey; at the age of

Great-uncle Timothy she well knew that Jack would be playing carpet golf

in her bedroom, and "wiping somebody's eye."

He was telling them now how he had "pipped the pro--a charmin' fellow,

playin' a very good game," at the last hole this morning; and how he

had pulled down to Caversham since lunch, and trying to incite Prosper

Profond to play him a set of tennis after tea--do him good--"keep him

fit.

"But what's the use of keepin' fit?" said Monsieur Profond.

"Yes, sir," murmured Michael Mont, "what do you keep fit for?"

"Jack," cried Imogen, enchanted, "what do you keep fit for?"

Jack Cardigan stared with all his health. The questions were like the

buzz of a mosquito, and he put up his hand to wipe them away. During the

War, of course, he had kept fit to kill Germans; now that it was over

he either did not know, or shrank in delicacy from explanation of his

moving principle.

"But he's right," said Monsieur Profond unexpectedly, "there's nothin'

left but keepin' fit."

The saying, too deep for Sunday afternoon, would have passed unanswered,

but for the mercurial nature of young Mont.

"Good!" he cried. "That's the great discovery of the War. We all thought

we were progressing--now we know we're only changing."

"For the worse," said Monsieur Profond genially.

"How you are cheerful, Prosper!" murmured Annette.

"You come and play tennis!" said Jack Cardigan; "you've got the hump.

We'll soon take that down. D'you play, Mr. Mont?"

"I hit the ball about, sir."

At this juncture Soames rose, ruffled in that deep instinct of

preparation for the future which guided his existence.

"When Fleur comes--" he heard Jack Cardigan say.

Ah! and why didn't she come? He passed through drawing-room, hall, and

porch out on to the drive, and stood there listening for the car. All

was still and Sundayfied; the lilacs in full flower scented the air.

There were white clouds, like the feathers of ducks gilded by the

sunlight. Memory of the day when Fleur was born, and he had waited in

such agony with her life and her mother's balanced in his hands, came

to him sharply. He had saved her then, to be the flower of his life. And

now! was she going to give him trouble--pain--give him trouble? He did

not like the look of things! A blackbird broke in on his reverie with

an evening song--a great big fellow up in that acacia-tree. Soames had

taken quite an interest in his birds of late years; he and Fleur would

walk round and watch them; her eyes were sharp as needles, and she knew

every nest. He saw her dog, a retriever, lying on the drive in a patch

of sunlight, and called to him. "Hallo, old fellow-waiting for her too!"

The dog came slowly with a grudging tail, and Soames mechanically laid

a pat on his head. The dog, the bird, the lilac, all were part of Fleur

for him; no more, no less. 'Too fond of her!' he thought, 'too fond!' He

was like a man uninsured, with his ships at sea. Uninsured again--as in

that other time, so long ago, when he would wander dumb and jealous in

the wilderness of London, longing for that woman--his first wife--the

mother of this infernal boy. Ah! There was the car at last! It drew up,

it had luggage, but no Fleur.

"Miss Fleur is walking up, sir, by the towing-path."

Walking all those miles? Soames stared. The man's face had the beginning

of a smile on it. What was he grinning at? And very quickly he turned,

saying, "All right, Sims!" and went into the house. He mounted to the

picture-gallery once more. He had from there a view of the river bank,

and stood with his eyes fixed on it, oblivious of the fact that it would

be an hour at least before her figure showed there. Walking up! And

that fellow's grin! The boy--! He turned abruptly from the window. He

couldn't spy on her. If she wanted to keep things from him--she must; he

could not spy on her. His heart felt empty, and bitterness mounted from

it into his very mouth. The staccato shouts of Jack Cardigan pursuing

the ball, the laugh of young Mont rose in the stillness and came in.

He hoped they were making that chap Profond run. And the girl in "La

Vendimia" stood with her arm akimbo and her dreamy eyes looking past

him. 'I've done all I could for you,' he thought, 'since you were no

higher than my knee. You aren't going to--to--hurt me, are you?'

But the Goya copy answered not, brilliant in colour just beginning to

tone down. 'There's no real life in it,' thought Soames. 'Why doesn't

she come?'

X.--TRIO

Among those four Forsytes of the third, and, as one might say, fourth

generation, at Wansdon under the Downs, a week-end prolonged unto the

ninth day had stretched the crossing threads of tenacity almost to

snapping-point. Never had Fleur been so "fine," Holly so watchful, Val

so stable-secretive, Jon so silent and disturbed. What he learned of

farming in that week might have been balanced on the point of a penknife

and puffed off. He, whose nature was essentially averse from intrigue,

and whose adoration of Fleur disposed him to think that any need for

concealing it was "skittles," chafed and fretted, yet obeyed, taking

what relief he could in the few moments when they were alone.

On Thursday, while they were standing in the bay window of the

drawing-room, dressed for dinner, she said to him:

"Jon, I'm going home on Sunday by the 3.40 from Paddington; if you were

to go home on Saturday you could come up on Sunday and take me down, and

just get back here by the last train, after. You were going home anyway,

weren't you?"

Jon nodded.

"Anything to be with you," he said; "only why need I pretend--"

Fleur slipped her little finger into his palm:

"You have no instinct, Jon; you must leave things to me. It's serious

about our people. We've simply got to be secret at present, if we want

to be together." The door was opened, and she added loudly: "You are a

duffer, Jon."

Something turned over within Jon; he could not bear this subterfuge

about a feeling so natural, so overwhelming, and so sweet.

On Friday night about eleven he had packed his bag, and was leaning out

of his window, half miserable, and half lost in a dream of Paddington

station, when he heard a tiny sound, as of a finger-nail tapping on his

door. He rushed to it and listened. Again the sound. It was a nail. He

opened. Oh! What a lovely thing came in!

"I wanted to show you my fancy dress," it said, and struck an attitude

at the foot of his bed.

Jon drew a long breath and leaned against the door. The apparition

wore white muslin on its head, a fichu round its bare neck over a

wine-coloured dress, fulled out below its slender waist.

It held one arm akimbo, and the other raised, right-angled, holding a

fan which touched its head.

"This ought to be a basket of grapes," it whispered, "but I haven't got

it here. It's my Goya dress. And this is the attitude in the picture. Do

you like it?"

"It's a dream."

The apparition pirouetted. "Touch it, and see."

Jon knelt down and took the skirt reverently.

"Grape colour," came the whisper, "all grapes--La Vendimia--the

vintage."

Jon's fingers scarcely touched each side of the waist; he looked up,

with adoring eyes.

"Oh! Jon," it whispered; bent, kissed his forehead, pirouetted again,

and, gliding out, was gone.

Jon stayed on his knees, and his head fell forward against the bed.

How long he stayed like that he did not know. The little noises--of

the tapping nail, the feet, the skirts rustling--as in a dream--went on

about him; and before his closed eyes the figure stood and smiled and

whispered, a faint perfume of narcissus lingering in the air. And his

forehead where it had been kissed had a little cool place between the

brows, like the imprint of a flower. Love filled his soul, that love of

boy for girl which knows so little, hopes so much, would not brush the

down off for the world, and must become in time a fragrant memory--a

searing passion--a humdrum mateship--or, once in many times, vintage

full and sweet with sunset colour on the grapes.

Enough has been said about Jon Forsyte here and in another place to show

what long marches lay between him and his great-great-grandfather, the

first Jolyon, in Dorset down by the sea. Jon was sensitive as a girl,

more sensitive than nine out of ten girls of the day; imaginative as one

of his half-sister June's "lame duck" painters; affectionate as a son

of his father and his mother naturally would be. And yet, in his inner

tissue, there was something of the old founder of his family, a secret

tenacity of soul, a dread of showing his feelings, a determination not

to know when he was beaten. Sensitive, imaginative, affectionate boys

get a bad time at school, but Jon had instinctively kept his nature

dark, and been but normally unhappy there. Only with his mother had he,

up till then, been absolutely frank and natural; and when he went home

to Robin Hill that Saturday his heart was heavy because Fleur had said

that he must not be frank and natural with her from whom he had never

yet kept anything, must not even tell her that they had met again,

unless he found that she knew already. So intolerable did this seem to

him that he was very near to telegraphing an excuse and staying up in

London. And the first thing his mother said to him was:

"So you've had our little friend of the confectioner's there, Jon. What

is she like on second thoughts?"

With relief, and a high colour, Jon answered:

"Oh! awfully jolly, Mum."

Her arm pressed his.

Jon had never loved her so much as in that minute which seemed to

falsify Fleur's fears and to release his soul. He turned to look at her,

but something in her smiling face--something which only he perhaps would

have caught--stopped the words bubbling up in him. Could fear go with a

smile? If so, there was fear in her face. And out of Jon tumbled quite

other words, about farming, Holly, and the Downs. Talking fast, he

waited for her to come back to Fleur. But she did not. Nor did

his father mention her, though of course he, too, must know. What

deprivation, and killing of reality was in his silence about Fleur--when

he was so full of her; when his mother was so full of Jon, and his

father so full of his mother! And so the trio spent the evening of that

Saturday.

After dinner his mother played; she seemed to play all the things he

liked best, and he sat with one knee clasped, and his hair standing up

where his fingers had run through it. He gazed at his mother while she

played, but he saw Fleur--Fleur in the moonlit orchard, Fleur in the

sunlit gravel-pit, Fleur in that fancy dress, swaying, whispering,

stooping, kissing his forehead. Once, while he listened, he forgot

himself and glanced at his father in that other easy chair. What was

Dad looking like that for? The expression on his face was so sad and

puzzling. It filled him with a sort of remorse, so that he got up and

went and sat on the arm of his father's chair. From there he could not

see his face; and again he saw Fleur--in his mother's hands, slim and

white on the keys, in the profile of her face and her powdery hair;

and down the long room in the open window where the May night walked

outside.

When he went up to bed his mother came into his room. She stood at the

window, and said:

"Those cypresses your grandfather planted down there have done

wonderfully. I always think they look beautiful under a dropping moon. I

wish you had known your grandfather, Jon."

"Were you married to father when he was alive?" asked Jon suddenly.

"No, dear; he died in '92--very old--eighty-five, I think."

"Is Father like him?"

"A little, but more subtle, and not quite so solid."

"I know, from grandfather's portrait; who painted that?"

"One of June's 'lame ducks.' But it's quite good."

Jon slipped his hand through his mother's arm. "Tell me about the family

quarrel, Mum."

He felt her arm quivering. "No, dear; that's for your Father some day,

if he thinks fit."

"Then it was serious," said Jon, with a catch in his breath.

"Yes." And there was a silence, during which neither knew whether the

arm or the hand within it were quivering most.

"Some people," said Irene softly, "think the moon on her back is evil;

to me she's always lovely. Look at those cypress shadows! Jon, Father

says we may go to Italy, you and I, for two months. Would you like?"

Jon took his hand from under her arm; his sensation was so sharp and

so confused. Italy with his mother! A fortnight ago it would have been

perfection; now it filled him with dismay; he felt that the sudden

suggestion had to do with Fleur. He stammered out:

"Oh! yes; only--I don't know. Ought I--now I've just begun? I'd like to

think it over."

Her voice answered, cool and gentle:

"Yes, dear; think it over. But better now than when you've begun farming

seriously. Italy with you! It would be nice!"

Jon put his arm round her waist, still slim and firm as a girl's.

"Do you think you ought to leave Father?" he said feebly, feeling very

mean.

"Father suggested it; he thinks you ought to see Italy at least before

you settle down to anything."

The sense of meanness died in Jon; he knew, yes--he knew--that his

father and his mother were not speaking frankly, no more than he

himself. They wanted to keep him from Fleur. His heart hardened. And, as

if she felt that process going on, his mother said:

"Good-night, darling. Have a good sleep and think it over. But it would

be lovely!"

She pressed him to her so quickly that he did not see her face. Jon

stood feeling exactly as he used to when he was a naughty little boy;

sore because he was not loving, and because he was justified in his own

eyes.

But Irene, after she had stood a moment in her own room, passed through

the dressing-room between it and her husband's.

"Well?"

"He will think it over, Jolyon."

Watching her lips that wore a little drawn smile, Jolyon said quietly:

"You had better let me tell him, and have done with it. After all, Jon

has the instincts of a gentleman. He has only to understand--"

"Only! He can't understand; that's impossible."

"I believe I could have at his age."

Irene caught his hand. "You were always more of a realist than Jon; and

never so innocent."

"That's true," said Jolyon. "It's queer, isn't it? You and I would tell

our stories to the world without a particle of shame; but our own boy

stumps us."

"We've never cared whether the world approves or not."

"Jon would not disapprove of us!"

"Oh! Jolyon, yes. He's in love, I feel he's in love. And he'd say: 'My

mother once married without love! How could she have!' It'll seem to him

a crime! And so it was!"

Jolyon took her hand, and said with a wry smile:

"Ah! why on earth are we born young? Now, if only we were born old and

grew younger year by year, we should understand how things happen, and

drop all our cursed intolerance. But you know if the boy is really

in love, he won't forget, even if he goes to Italy. We're a tenacious

breed; and he'll know by instinct why he's being sent. Nothing will

really cure him but the shock of being told."

"Let me try, anyway."

Jolyon stood a moment without speaking. Between this devil and this deep

sea--the pain of a dreaded disclosure and the grief of losing his wife

for two months--he secretly hoped for the devil; yet if she wished for

the deep sea he must put up with it. After all, it would be training for

that departure from which there would be no return. And, taking her in

his arms, he kissed her eyes, and said:

"As you will, my love."

XI.--DUET

That "small" emotion, love, grows amazingly when threatened with

extinction. Jon reached Paddington station half an hour before his time

and a full week after, as it seemed to him. He stood at the appointed

bookstall, amid a crowd of Sunday travellers, in a Harris tweed suit

exhaling, as it were, the emotion of his thumping heart. He read the

names of the novels on the book-stall, and bought one at last, to avoid

being regarded with suspicion by the book-stall clerk. It was called

"The Heart of the Trail!" which must mean something, though it did not

seem to. He also bought "The Lady's Mirror" and "The Landsman." Every

minute was an hour long, and full of horrid imaginings. After nineteen

had passed, he saw her with a bag and a porter wheeling her luggage. She

came swiftly; she came cool. She greeted him as if he were a brother.

"First class," she said to the porter, "corner seats; opposite."

Jon admired her frightful self-possession.

"Can't we get a carriage to ourselves," he whispered.

"No good; it's a stopping train. After Maidenhead perhaps. Look natural,

Jon."

Jon screwed his features into a scowl. They got in--with two other

beasts!--oh! heaven! He tipped the porter unnaturally, in his confusion.

The brute deserved nothing for putting them in there, and looking as if

he knew all about it into the bargain.

Fleur hid herself behind "The Lady's Mirror." Jon imitated her behind

"The Landsman." The train started. Fleur let "The Lady's Mirror" fall

and leaned forward.

"Well?" she said.

"It's seemed about fifteen days."

She nodded, and Jon's face lighted up at once.

"Look natural," murmured Fleur, and went off into a bubble of laughter.

It hurt him. How could he look natural with Italy hanging over him? He

had meant to break it to her gently, but now he blurted it out.

"They want me to go to Italy with Mother for two months."

Fleur drooped her eyelids; turned a little pale, and bit her lips. "Oh!"

she said. It was all, but it was much.

That "Oh!" was like the quick drawback of the wrist in fencing ready for

riposte. It came.

"You must go!"

"Go?" said Jon in a strangled voice.

"Of course."

"But--two months--it's ghastly."

"No," said Fleur, "six weeks. You'll have forgotten me by then. We'll

meet in the National Gallery the day after you get back."

Jon laughed.

"But suppose you've forgotten me," he muttered into the noise of the

train.

Fleur shook her head.

"Some other beast--" murmured Jon.

Her foot touched his.

"No other beast," she said, lifting "The Lady's Mirror."

The train stopped; two passengers got out, and one got in.

'I shall die,' thought Jon, 'if we're not alone at all.'

The train went on; and again Fleur leaned forward.

"I never let go," she said; "do you?"

Jon shook his head vehemently.

"Never!" he said. "Will you write to me?"

"No; but you can--to my Club."

She had a Club; she was wonderful!

"Did you pump Holly?" he muttered.

"Yes, but I got nothing. I didn't dare pump hard."

"What can it be?" cried Jon.

"I shall find out all right."

A long silence followed till Fleur said: "This is Maidenhead; stand by,

Jon!"

The train stopped. The remaining passenger got out. Fleur drew down her

blind.

"Quick!" she cried. "Hang out! Look as much of a beast as you can."

Jon blew his nose, and scowled; never in all his life had he scowled

like that! An old lady recoiled, a young one tried the handle. It

turned, but the door would not open. The train moved, the young lady

darted to another carriage.

"What luck!" cried Jon. "It Jammed."

"Yes," said Fleur; "I was holding it."

The train moved out, and Jon fell on his knees.

"Look out for the corridor," she whispered; "and--quick!"

Her lips met his. And though their kiss only lasted perhaps ten seconds,

Jon's soul left his body and went so far beyond, that, when he was again

sitting opposite that demure figure, he was pale as death. He heard

her sigh, and the sound seemed to him the most precious he had ever

heard--an exquisite declaration that he meant something to her.

"Six weeks isn't really long," she said; "and you can easily make it six

if you keep your head out there, and never seem to think of me."

Jon gasped.

"This is just what's really wanted, Jon, to convince them, don't

you see? If we're just as bad when you come back they'll stop being

ridiculous about it. Only, I'm sorry it's not Spain; there's a girl in a

Goya picture at Madrid who's like me, Father says. Only she isn't--we've

got a copy of her."

It was to Jon like a ray of sunshine piercing through a fog. "I'll make

it Spain," he said, "Mother won't mind; she's never been there. And my

Father thinks a lot of Goya."

"Oh! yes, he's a painter--isn't he?"

"Only water-colour," said Jon, with honesty.

"When we come to Reading, Jon, get out first and go down to Caversham

lock and wait for me. I'll send the car home and we'll walk by the

towing-path."

Jon seized her hand in gratitude, and they sat silent, with the world

well lost, and one eye on the corridor. But the train seemed to run

twice as fast now, and its sound was almost lost in that of Jon's

sighing.

"We're getting near," said Fleur; "the towing-path's awfully exposed.

One more! Oh! Jon, don't forget me."

Jon answered with his kiss. And very soon, a flushed, distracted-looking

youth could have been seen--as they say--leaping from the train and

hurrying along the platform, searching his pockets for his ticket.

When at last she rejoined him on the towing-path a little beyond

Caversham lock he had made an effort, and regained some measure of

equanimity. If they had to part, he would not make a scene! A breeze by

the bright river threw the white side of the willow leaves up into the

sunlight, and followed those two with its faint rustle.

"I told our chauffeur that I was train-giddy," said Fleur. "Did you look

pretty natural as you went out?"

"I don't know. What is natural?"

"It's natural to you to look seriously happy. When I first saw you I

thought you weren't a bit like other people."

"Exactly what I thought when I saw you. I knew at once I should never

love anybody else."

Fleur laughed.

"We're absurdly young. And love's young dream is out of date, Jon.

Besides, it's awfully wasteful. Think of all the fun you might have. You

haven't begun, even; it's a shame, really. And there's me. I wonder!"

Confusion came on Jon's spirit. How could she say such things just as

they were going to part?

"If you feel like that," he said, "I can't go. I shall tell Mother that

I ought to try and work. There's always the condition of the world!"

"The condition of the world!"

Jon thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"But there is," he said; "think of the people starving!"

Fleur shook her head. "No, no, I never, never will make myself miserable

for nothing."

"Nothing! But there's an awful state of things, and of course one ought

to help."

"Oh! yes, I know all that. But you can't help people, Jon; they're

hopeless. When you pull them out they only get into another hole. Look

at them, still fighting and plotting and struggling, though they're

dying in heaps all the time. Idiots!"

"Aren't you sorry for them?"

"Oh! sorry--yes, but I'm not going to make myself unhappy about it;

that's no good."

And they were silent, disturbed by this first glimpse of each other's

natures.

"I think people are brutes and idiots," said Fleur stubbornly.

"I think they're poor wretches," said Jon. It was as if they had

quarrelled--and at this supreme and awful moment, with parting visible

out there in that last gap of the willows!

"Well, go and help your poor wretches, and don't think of me."

Jon stood still. Sweat broke out on his forehead, and his limbs

trembled. Fleur too had stopped, and was frowning at the river.

"I must believe in things," said Jon with a sort of agony; "we're all

meant to enjoy life."

Fleur laughed. "Yes; and that's what you won't do, if you don't take

care. But perhaps your idea of enjoyment is to make yourself wretched.

There are lots of people like that, of course."

She was pale, her eyes had darkened, her lips had thinned. Was it Fleur

thus staring at the water? Jon had an unreal feeling as if he were

passing through the scene in a book where the lover has to choose

between love and duty. But just then she looked round at him. Never was

anything so intoxicating as that vivacious look. It acted on him exactly

as the tug of a chain acts on a dog--brought him up to her with his tail

wagging and his tongue out.

"Don't let's be silly," she said, "time's too short. Look, Jon, you can

just see where I've got to cross the river. There, round the bend, where

the woods begin."

Jon saw a gable, a chimney or two, a patch of wall through the

trees--and felt his heart sink.

"I mustn't dawdle any more. It's no good going beyond the next hedge, it

gets all open. Let's get on to it and say good-bye."

They went side by side, hand in hand, silently toward the hedge, where

the may-flower, both pink and white, was in full bloom.

"My Club's the 'Talisman,' Stratton Street, Piccadilly. Letters there

will be quite safe, and I'm almost always up once a week."

Jon nodded. His face had become extremely set, his eyes stared straight

before him.

"To-day's the twenty-third of May," said Fleur; "on the ninth of July

I shall be in front of the 'Bacchus and Ariadne' at three o'clock; will

you?"

"I will."

"If you feel as bad as I it's all right. Let those people pass!"

A man and woman airing their children went by strung out in Sunday

fashion.

The last of them passed the wicket gate.

"Domesticity!" said Fleur, and blotted herself against the hawthorn

hedge. The blossom sprayed out above her head, and one pink cluster

brushed her cheek. Jon put up his hand jealously to keep it off.

"Good-bye, Jon." For a second they stood with hands hard clasped. Then

their lips met for the third time, and when they parted Fleur broke away

and fled through the wicket gate. Jon stood where she had left him, with

his forehead against that pink cluster. Gone! For an eternity--for seven

weeks all but two days! And here he was, wasting the last sight of

her! He rushed to the gate. She was walking swiftly on the heels of the

straggling children. She turned her head, he saw her hand make a little

flitting gesture; then she sped on, and the trailing family blotted her

out from his view.

The words of a comic song--

"Paddington groan-worst ever known

He gave a sepulchral Paddington groan--"

came into his head, and he sped incontinently back to Reading station.

All the way up to London and down to Wansdon he sat with "The Heart

of the Trail" open on his knee, knitting in his head a poem so full of

feeling that it would not rhyme.

XII.--CAPRICE

Fleur sped on. She had need of rapid motion; she was late, and wanted

all her wits about her when she got in. She passed the islands, the

station, and hotel, and was about to take the ferry, when she saw a

skiff with a young man standing up in it, and holding to the bushes.

"Miss Forsyte," he said; "let me put you across. I've come on purpose."

She looked at him in blank amazement.

"It's all right, I've been having tea with your people. I thought I'd

save you the last bit. It's on my way, I'm just off back to Pangbourne.

My name's Mont. I saw you at the picture-gallery--you remember--when

your father invited me to see his pictures."

"Oh!" said Fleur; "yes--the handkerchief."

To this young man she owed Jon; and, taking his hand, she stepped down

into the skiff. Still emotional, and a little out of breath, she sat

silent; not so the young man. She had never heard any one say so much in

so short a time. He told her his age, twenty-four; his weight, ten stone

eleven; his place of residence, not far away; described his sensations

under fire, and what it felt like to be gassed; criticized the Juno,

mentioned his own conception of that goddess; commented on the Goya

copy, said Fleur was not too awfully like it; sketched in rapidly the

condition of England; spoke of Monsieur Profond--or whatever his name

was--as "an awful sport"; thought her father had some "ripping" pictures

and some rather "dug-up"; hoped he might row down again and take her

on the river because he was quite trustworthy; inquired her opinion of

Tchekov, gave her his own; wished they could go to the Russian ballet

together some time--considered the name Fleur Forsyte simply topping;

cursed his people for giving him the name of Michael on the top of Mont;

outlined his father, and said that if she wanted a good book she should

read "Job"; his father was rather like Job while Job still had land.

"But Job didn't have land," Fleur murmured; "he only had flocks and

herds and moved on."

"Ah!" answered Michael Mont, "I wish my gov'nor would move on. Not that

I want his land. Land's an awful bore in these days, don't you think?"

"We never have it in my family," said Fleur. "We have everything else.

I believe one of my great-uncles once had a sentimental farm in Dorset,

because we came from there originally, but it cost him more than it made

him happy."

"Did he sell it?"

"No; he kept it."

"Why?"

"Because nobody would buy it."

"Good for the old boy!"

"No, it wasn't good for him. Father says it soured him. His name was

Swithin."

"What a corking name!"

"Do you know that we're getting farther off, not nearer? This river

flows."

"Splendid!" cried Mont, dipping his sculls vaguely; "it's good to meet a

girl who's got wit."

"But better to meet a young man who's got it in the plural."

Young Mont raised a hand to tear his hair.

"Look out!" cried Fleur. "Your scull!"

"All right! It's thick enough to bear a scratch."

"Do you mind sculling?" said Fleur severely. "I want to get in."

"Ah!" said Mont; "but when you get in, you see, I shan't see you any

more to-day. Fini, as the French girl said when she jumped on her bed

after saying her prayers. Don't you bless the day that gave you a French

mother, and a name like yours?"

"I like my name, but Father gave it me. Mother wanted me called

Marguerite."

"Which is absurd. Do you mind calling me M. M. and letting me call you

F. F.? It's in the spirit of the age."

"I don't mind anything, so long as I get in."

Mont caught a little crab, and answered: "That was a nasty one!"

"Please row."

"I am." And he did for several strokes, looking at her with rueful

eagerness. "Of course, you know," he ejaculated, pausing, "that I came

to see you, not your father's pictures."

Fleur rose.

"If you don't row, I shall get out and swim."

"Really and truly? Then I could come in after you."

"Mr. Mont, I'm late and tired; please put me on shore at once."

When she stepped out on to the garden landing-stage he rose, and

grasping his hair with both hands, looked at her.

Fleur smiled.

"Don't!" cried the irrepressible Mont. "I know you're going to say:

'Out, damned hair!'"

Fleur whisked round, threw him a wave of her hand. "Good-bye, Mr.

M.M.!" she called, and was gone among the rose-trees. She looked at her

wrist-watch and the windows of the house. It struck her as curiously

uninhabited. Past six! The pigeons were just gathering to roost, and

sunlight slanted on the dovecot, on their snowy feathers, and beyond

in a shower on the top boughs of the woods. The click of billiard-balls

came from the ingle-nook--Jack Cardigan, no doubt; a faint rustling,

too, from an eucalyptus-tree, startling Southerner in this old English

garden. She reached the verandah and was passing in, but stopped at

the sound of voices from the drawing-room to her left. Mother! Monsieur

Profond! From behind the verandah screen which fenced the ingle-nook she

heard these words:

"I don't, Annette."

Did Father know that he called her mother "Annette"? Always on the side

of her Father--as children are ever on one side or the other in houses

where relations are a little strained--she stood, uncertain. Her mother

was speaking in her low, pleasing, slightly metallic voice--one word she

caught: "Demain." And Profond's answer: "All right." Fleur frowned. A

little sound came out into the stillness. Then Profond's voice: "I'm

takin' a small stroll."

Fleur darted through the window into the morning-room. There he came

from the drawing-room, crossing the verandah, down the lawn; and the

click of billiard-balls which, in listening for other sounds, she had

ceased to hear, began again. She shook herself, passed into the hall,

and opened the drawing-room door. Her mother was sitting on the sofa

between the windows, her knees crossed, her head resting on a cushion,

her lips half parted, her eyes half closed. She looked extraordinarily

handsome.

"Ah! Here you are, Fleur! Your father is beginning to fuss."

"Where is he?"

"In the picture-gallery. Go up!"

"What are you going to do to-morrow, Mother?"

"To-morrow? I go up to London with your aunt."

"I thought you might be. Will you get me a quite plain parasol?"

"What colour?"

"Green. They're all going back, I suppose."

"Yes, all; you will console your father. Kiss me, then."

Fleur crossed the room, stooped, received a kiss on her forehead, and

went out past the impress of a form on the sofa-cushions in the other

corner. She ran up-stairs.

Fleur was by no means the old-fashioned daughter who demands the

regulation of her parents' lives in accordance with the standard imposed

upon herself. She claimed to regulate her own life, not those of others;

besides, an unerring instinct for what was likely to advantage her own

case was already at work. In a disturbed domestic atmosphere the heart

she had set on Jon would have a better chance. None the less was she

offended, as a flower by a crisping wind. If that man had really been

kissing her mother it was--serious, and her father ought to know.

"Demain!" "All right!" And her mother going up to Town! She turned

into her bedroom and hung out of the window to cool her face, which had

suddenly grown very hot. Jon must be at the station by now! What did her

father know about Jon? Probably everything--pretty nearly!

She changed her dress, so as to look as if she had been in some time,

and ran up to the gallery.

Soames was standing stubbornly still before his Alfred Stevens--the

picture he loved best. He did not turn at the sound of the door, but she

knew he had heard, and she knew he was hurt. She came up softly behind

him, put her arms round his neck, and poked her face over his shoulder

till her cheek lay against his. It was an advance which had never yet

failed, but it failed her now, and she augured the worst. "Well," he

said stonily, "so you've come!"

"Is that all," murmured Fleur, "from a bad parent?" And she rubbed her

cheek against his.

Soames shook his head so far as that was possible.

"Why do you keep me on tenterhooks like this, putting me off and off?"

"Darling, it was very harmless."

"Harmless! Much you know what's harmless and what isn't."

Fleur dropped her arms.

"Well, then, dear, suppose you tell me; and be quite frank about it."

And she went over to the window-seat.

Her father had turned from his picture, and was staring at his feet. He

looked very grey. 'He has nice small feet,' she thought, catching his

eye, at once averted from her.

"You're my only comfort," said Soames suddenly, "and you go on like

this."

Fleur's heart began to beat.

"Like what, dear?"

Again Soames gave her a look which, but for the affection in it, might

have been called furtive.

"You know what I told you," he said. "I don't choose to have anything to

do with that branch of our family."

"Yes, ducky, but I don't know why I shouldn't."

Soames turned on his heel.

"I'm not going into the reasons," he said; "you ought to trust me,

Fleur!"

The way he spoke those words affected Fleur, but she thought of Jon, and

was silent, tapping her foot against the wainscot. Unconsciously she had

assumed a modern attitude, with one leg twisted in and out of the other,

with her chin on one bent wrist, her other arm across her chest, and

its hand hugging her elbow; there was not a line of her that was not

involuted, and yet--in spite of all--she retained a certain grace.

"You knew my wishes," Soames went on, "and yet you stayed on there four

days. And I suppose that boy came with you to-day."

Fleur kept her eyes on him.

"I don't ask you anything," said Soames; "I make no inquisition where

you're concerned."

Fleur suddenly stood up, leaning out at the window with her chin on her

hands. The sun had sunk behind trees, the pigeons were perched, quite

still, on the edge of the dove-cot; the click of the billiard-balls

mounted, and a faint radiance shone out below where Jack Cardigan had

turned the light up.

"Will it make you any happier," she said suddenly, "if I promise you not

to see him for say--the next six weeks?" She was not prepared for a sort

of tremble in the blankness of his voice.

"Six weeks? Six years--sixty years more like. Don't delude yourself,

Fleur; don't delude yourself!"

Fleur turned in alarm.

"Father, what is it?"

Soames came close enough to see her face.

"Don't tell me," he said, "that you're foolish enough to have any

feeling beyond caprice. That would be too much!" And he laughed.

Fleur, who had never heard him laugh like that, thought: 'Then it is

deep! Oh! what is it?' And putting her hand through his arm she said

lightly:

"No, of course; caprice. Only, I like my caprices and I don't like

yours, dear."

"Mine!" said Soames bitterly, and turned away.

The light outside had chilled, and threw a chalky whiteness on the

river. The trees had lost all gaiety of colour. She felt a sudden hunger

for Jon's face, for his hands, and the feel of his lips again on hers.

And pressing her arms tight across her breast she forced out a little

light laugh.

"O la! la! What a small fuss! as Profond would say. Father, I don't like

that man."

She saw him stop, and take something out of his breast pocket.

"You don't?" he said. "Why?"

"Nothing," murmured Fleur; "just caprice!"

"No," said Soames; "not caprice!" And he tore what was in his hands

across. "You're right. I don't like him either!"

"Look!" said Fleur softly. "There he goes! I hate his shoes; they don't

make any noise."

Down in the failing light Prosper Profond moved, his hands in his side

pockets, whistling softly in his beard; he stopped, and glanced up at

the sky, as if saying: "I don't think much of that small moon."

Fleur drew back. "Isn't he a great cat?" she whispered; and the sharp

click of the billiard-balls rose, as if Jack Cardigan had capped the

cat, the moon, caprice, and tragedy with: "In off the red!"

Monsieur Profond had resumed his stroll, to a teasing little tune in his

beard. What was it? Oh! yes, from "Rigoletto": "Donna a mobile." Just

what he would think! She squeezed her father's arm.

"Prowling!" she muttered, as he turned the corner of the house. It was

past that disillusioned moment which divides the day and night-still and

lingering and warm, with hawthorn scent and lilac scent clinging on the

riverside air. A blackbird suddenly burst out. Jon would be in London

by now; in the Park perhaps, crossing the Serpentine, thinking of her!

A little sound beside her made her turn her eyes; her father was again

tearing the paper in his hands. Fleur saw it was a cheque.

"I shan't sell him my Gauguin," he said. "I don't know what your aunt

and Imogen see in him."

"Or Mother."

"Your mother!" said Soames.

'Poor Father!' she thought. 'He never looks happy--not really happy. I

don't want to make him worse, but of course I shall have to, when Jon

comes back. Oh! well, sufficient unto the night!'

"I'm going to dress," she said.

In her room she had a fancy to put on her "freak" dress. It was of gold

tissue with little trousers of the same, tightly drawn in at the

ankles, a page's cape slung from the shoulders, little gold shoes, and

a gold-winged Mercury helmet; and all over her were tiny gold bells,

especially on the helmet; so that if she shook her head she pealed. When

she was dressed she felt quite sick because Jon could not see her; it

even seemed a pity that the sprightly young man Michael Mont would not

have a view. But the gong had sounded, and she went down.

She made a sensation in the drawing-room. Winifred thought it "Most

amusing." Imogen was enraptured. Jack Cardigan called it "stunning,"

"ripping," "topping," and "corking."

Monsieur Profond, smiling with his eyes, said: "That's a nice small

dress!" Her mother, very handsome in black, sat looking at her, and said

nothing. It remained for her father to apply the test of common sense.

"What did you put on that thing for? You're not going to dance."

Fleur spun round, and the bells pealed.

"Caprice!"

Soames stared at her, and, turning away, gave his arm to Winifred. Jack

Cardigan took her mother. Prosper Profond took Imogen. Fleur went in by

herself, with her bells jingling....

The "small" moon had soon dropped down, and May night had fallen soft

and warm, enwrapping with its grape-bloom colour and its scents the

billion caprices, intrigues, passions, longings, and regrets of men and

women. Happy was Jack Cardigan who snored into Imogen's white shoulder,

fit as a flea; or Timothy in his "mausoleum," too old for anything

but baby's slumber. For so many lay awake, or dreamed, teased by the

criss-cross of the world.

The dew fell and the flowers closed; cattle grazed on in the river

meadows, feeling with their tongues for the grass they could not see;

and the sheep on the Downs lay quiet as stones. Pheasants in the tall

trees of the Pangbourne woods, larks on their grassy nests above the

gravel-pit at Wansdon, swallows in the eaves at Robin Hill, and the

sparrows of Mayfair, all made a dreamless night of it, soothed by the

lack of wind. The Mayfly filly, hardly accustomed to her new quarters,

scraped at her straw a little; and the few night-flitting things--bats,

moths, owls--were vigorous in the warm darkness; but the peace of night

lay in the brain of all day-time Nature, colourless and still. Men and

women, alone, riding the hobby-horses of anxiety or love, burned their

wavering tapers of dream and thought into the lonely hours.

Fleur, leaning out of her window, heard the hall clock's muffled chime

of twelve, the tiny splash of a fish, the sudden shaking of an aspen's

leaves in the puffs of breeze that rose along the river, the distant

rumble of a night train, and time and again the sounds which none can

put a name to in the darkness, soft obscure expressions of uncatalogued

emotions from man and beast, bird and machine, or, maybe, from departed

Forsytes, Darties, Cardigans, taking night strolls back into a world

which had once suited their embodied spirits. But Fleur heeded not these

sounds; her spirit, far from disembodied, fled with swift wing from

railway-carriage to flowery hedge, straining after Jon, tenacious of his

forbidden image, and the sound of his voice, which was taboo. And she

crinkled her nose, retrieving from the perfume of the riverside night

that moment when his hand slipped between the mayflowers and her cheek.

Long she leaned out in her freak dress, keen to burn her wings at life's

candle; while the moths brushed her cheeks on their pilgrimage to the

lamp on her dressing-table, ignorant that in a Forsyte's house there

is no open flame. But at last even she felt sleepy, and, forgetting her

bells, drew quickly in.

Through the open window of his room, alongside Annette's, Soames,

wakeful too, heard their thin faint tinkle, as it might be shaken from

stars, or the dewdrops falling from a flower, if one could hear such

sounds.

'Caprice!' he thought. 'I can't tell. She's wilful. What shall I do?

Fleur!'

And long into the "small" night he brooded.

PART II

I.--MOTHER AND SON

To say that Jon Forsyte accompanied his mother to Spain unwillingly

would scarcely have been adequate. He went as a well-natured dog goes

for a walk with its mistress, leaving a choice mutton-bone on the lawn.

He went looking back at it. Forsytes deprived of their mutton-bones are

wont to sulk. But Jon had little sulkiness in his composition. He adored

his mother, and it was his first travel. Spain had become Italy by his

simply saying: "I'd rather go to Spain, Mum; you've been to Italy so

many times; I'd like it new to both of us."

The fellow was subtle besides being naive. He never forgot that he

was going to shorten the proposed two months into six weeks, and must

therefore show no sign of wishing to do so. For one with so enticing

a mutton-bone and so fixed an idea, he made a good enough travelling

companion, indifferent to where or when he arrived, superior to food,

and thoroughly appreciative of a country strange to the most travelled

Englishman. Fleur's wisdom in refusing to write to him was profound,

for he reached each new place entirely without hope or fever, and could

concentrate immediate attention on the donkeys and tumbling bells,

the priests, patios, beggars, children, crowing cocks, sombreros,

cactus-hedges, old high white villages, goats, olive-trees, greening

plains, singing birds in tiny cages, watersellers, sunsets, melons,

mules, great churches, pictures, and swimming grey-brown mountains of a

fascinating land.

It was already hot, and they enjoyed an absence of their compatriots.

Jon, who, so far as he knew, had no blood in him which was not English,

was often innately unhappy in the presence of his own countrymen. He

felt they had no nonsense about them, and took a more practical view

of things than himself. He confided to his mother that he must be an

unsociable beast--it was jolly to be away from everybody who could

talk about the things people did talk about. To which Irene had replied

simply:

"Yes, Jon, I know."

In this isolation he had unparalleled opportunities of appreciating

what few sons can apprehend, the whole-heartedness of a mother's

love. Knowledge of something kept from her made him, no doubt, unduly

sensitive; and a Southern people stimulated his admiration for her type

of beauty, which he had been accustomed to hear called Spanish, but

which he now perceived to be no such thing. Her beauty was neither

English, French, Spanish, nor Italian--it was special! He appreciated,

too, as never before, his mother's subtlety of instinct. He could not

tell, for instance, whether she had noticed his absorption in that Goya

picture, "La Vendimia," or whether she knew that he had slipped back

there after lunch and again next morning, to stand before it full half

an hour, a second and third time. It was not Fleur, of course, but

like enough to give him heartache--so dear to lovers--remembering her

standing at the foot of his bed with her hand held above her head. To

keep a postcard reproduction of this picture in his pocket and slip it

out to look at became for Jon one of those bad habits which soon or late

disclose themselves to eyes sharpened by love, fear, or jealousy. And

his mother's were sharpened by all three. In Granada he was fairly

caught, sitting on a sun-warmed stone bench in a little battlemented

garden on the Alhambra hill, whence he ought to have been looking at

the view. His mother, he had thought, was examining the potted stocks

between the polled acacias, when her voice said:

"Is that your favourite Goya, Jon?"

He checked, too late, a movement such as he might have made at school to

conceal some surreptitious document, and answered: "Yes."

"It certainly is most charming; but I think I prefer the 'Quitasol' Your

father would go crazy about Goya; I don't believe he saw them when he

was in Spain in '92."

In '92--nine years before he had been born! What had been the previous

existences of his father and his mother? If they had a right to share in

his future, surely he had a right to share in their pasts. He looked

up at her. But something in her face--a look of life hard-lived, the

mysterious impress of emotions, experience, and suffering-seemed,

with its incalculable depth, its purchased sanctity, to make curiosity

impertinent. His mother must have had a wonderfully interesting life;

she was so beautiful, and so--so--but he could not frame what he felt

about her. He got up, and stood gazing down at the town, at the plain

all green with crops, and the ring of mountains glamorous in sinking

sunlight. Her life was like the past of this old Moorish city, full,

deep, remote--his own life as yet such a baby of a thing, hopelessly

ignorant and innocent! They said that in those mountains to the

West, which rose sheer from the blue-green plain, as if out of a sea,

Phoenicians had dwelt--a dark, strange, secret race, above the land! His

mother's life was as unknown to him, as secret, as that Phoenician past

was to the town down there, whose cocks crowed and whose children played

and clamoured so gaily, day in, day out. He felt aggrieved that she

should know all about him and he nothing about her except that she loved

him and his father, and was beautiful. His callow ignorance--he had not

even had the advantage of the War, like nearly everybody else!--made him

small in his own eyes.

That night, from the balcony of his bedroom, he gazed down on the roof

of the town--as if inlaid with honeycomb of jet, ivory, and gold; and,

long after, he lay awake, listening to the cry of the sentry as the

hours struck, and forming in his head these lines:

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

Spanish city darkened under her white stars!

"What says the voice-its clear-lingering anguish?

Just the watchman, telling his dateless tale of safety?

Just a road-man, flinging to the moon his song?

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

Just his cry: 'How long?'"

The word "deprived" seemed to him cold and unsatisfactory, but

"bereaved" was too final, and no other word of two syllables short-long

came to him, which would enable him to keep "whose lover's heart is

weeping." It was past two by the time he had finished it, and past

three before he went to sleep, having said it over to himself at least

twenty-four times. Next day he wrote it out and enclosed it in one of

those letters to Fleur which he always finished before he went down, so

as to have his mind free and companionable.

About noon that same day, on the tiled terrace of their hotel, he felt a

sudden dull pain in the back of his head, a queer sensation in the eyes,

and sickness. The sun had touched him too affectionately. The next three

days were passed in semi-darkness, and a dulled, aching indifference to

all except the feel of ice on his forehead and his mother's smile. She

never moved from his room, never relaxed her noiseless vigilance, which

seemed to Jon angelic. But there were moments when he was extremely

sorry for himself, and wished terribly that Fleur could see him. Several

times he took a poignant imaginary leave of her and of the earth, tears

oozing out of his eyes. He even prepared the message he would send to

her by his mother--who would regret to her dying day that she had ever

sought to separate them--his poor mother! He was not slow, however, in

perceiving that he had now his excuse for going home.

Toward half-past six each evening came a "gasgacha" of bells--a cascade

of tumbling chimes, mounting from the city below and falling back chime

on chime. After listening to them on the fourth day he said suddenly:

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

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

felt better, and--meaner.

They had been out five weeks when they turned toward home. Jon's head

was restored to its pristine clarity, but he was confined to a hat lined

by his mother with many layers of orange and green silk and he still

walked from choice in the shade. As the long struggle of discretion

between them drew to its close, he wondered more and more whether she

could see his eagerness to get back to that which she had brought him

away from. Condemned by Spanish Providence to spend a day in Madrid

between their trains, it was but natural to go again to the Prado. Jon

was elaborately casual this time before his Goya girl. Now that he was

going back to her, he could afford a lesser scrutiny. It was his mother

who lingered before the picture, saying:

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

Jon heard her uneasily. Did she understand? But he felt once more that

he was no match for her in self-control and subtlety. She could, in some

supersensitive way, of which he had not the secret, feel the pulse of

his thoughts; she knew by instinct what he hoped and feared and wished.

It made him terribly uncomfortable and guilty, having, beyond most boys,

a conscience. He wished she would be frank with him, he almost hoped for

an open struggle. But none came, and steadily, silently, they travelled

north. Thus did he first learn how much better than men women play

a waiting game. In Paris they had again to pause for a day. Jon was

grieved because it lasted two, owing to certain matters in connection

with a dressmaker; as if his mother, who looked beautiful in anything,

had any need of dresses! The happiest moment of his travel was that when

he stepped on to the Folkestone boat.

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

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

to me."

Jon squeezed her arm.

"Oh! yes, I've enjoyed it awfully-except for my head lately."

And now that the end had come, he really had, feeling a sort of glamour

over the past weeks--a kind of painful pleasure, such as he had tried

to screw into those lines about the voice in the night crying; a feeling

such as he had known as a small boy listening avidly to Chopin, yet

wanting to cry. And he wondered why it was that he couldn't say to her

quite simply what she had said to him:

"You were very sweet to me." Odd--one never could be nice and natural

like that! He substituted the words: "I expect we shall be sick."

They were, and reached London somewhat attenuated, having been away six

weeks and two days, without a single allusion to the subject which had

hardly ever ceased to occupy their minds.

II.--FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Deprived of his wife and son by the Spanish adventure, Jolyon found the

solitude at Robin Hill intolerable. A philosopher when he has all that

he wants is different from a philosopher when he has not. Accustomed,

however, to the idea, if not to the reality of resignation, he would

perhaps have faced it out but for his daughter June. He was a "lame

duck" now, and on her conscience. Having achieved--momentarily--the

rescue of an etcher in low circumstances, which she happened to have

in hand, she appeared at Robin Hill a fortnight after Irene and Jon had

gone. June was living now in a tiny house with a big studio at Chiswick.

A Forsyte of the best period, so far as the lack of responsibility was

concerned, she had overcome the difficulty of a reduced income in a

manner satisfactory to herself and her father. The rent of the Gallery

off Cork Street which he had bought for her and her increased income tax

happening to balance, it had been quite simple--she no longer paid him

the rent. The Gallery might be expected now at any time, after eighteen

years of barren usufruct, to pay its way, so that she was sure her

father would not feel it. Through this device she still had twelve

hundred a year, and by reducing what she ate, and, in place of two

Belgians in a poor way, employing one Austrian in a poorer, practically

the same surplus for the relief of genius. After three days at Robin

Hill she carried her father back with her to Town. In those three

days she had stumbled on the secret he had kept for two years, and had

instantly decided to cure him. She knew, in fact, the very man. He

had done wonders with. Paul Post--that painter a little in advance of

Futurism; and she was impatient with her father because his eyebrows

would go up, and because he had heard of neither. Of course, if he

hadn't "faith" he would never get well! It was absurd not to have faith

in the man who had healed Paul Post so that he had only just relapsed,

from having overworked, or overlived, himself again. The great thing

about this healer was that he relied on Nature. He had made a special

study of the symptoms of Nature--when his patient failed in any natural

symptom he supplied the poison which caused it--and there you were! She

was extremely hopeful. Her father had clearly not been living a natural

life at Robin Hill, and she intended to provide the symptoms. He

was--she felt--out of touch with the times, which was not natural;

his heart wanted stimulating. In the little Chiswick house she and the

Austrian--a grateful soul, so devoted to June for rescuing her that she

was in danger of decease from overwork--stimulated Jolyon in all

sorts of ways, preparing him for his cure. But they could not keep his

eyebrows down; as, for example, when the Austrian woke him at eight

o'clock just as he was going to sleep, or June took The Times away from

him, because it was unnatural to read "that stuff" when he ought to be

taking an interest in "life." He never failed, indeed, to be astonished

at her resource, especially in the evenings. For his benefit, as she

declared, though he suspected that she also got something out of it, she

assembled the Age so far as it was satellite to genius; and with

some solemnity it would move up and down the studio before him in the

Fox-trot, and that more mental form of dancing--the One-step--which so

pulled against the music, that Jolyon's eyebrows would be almost lost

in his hair from wonder at the strain it must impose on the dancer's

will-power. Aware that, hung on the line in the Water Colour Society, he

was a back number to those with any pretension to be called artists, he

would sit in the darkest corner he could find, and wonder about rhythm,

on which so long ago he had been raised. And when June brought some girl

or young man up to him, he would rise humbly to their level so far as

that was possible, and think: 'Dear me! This is very dull for them!'

Having his father's perennial sympathy with Youth, he used to get

very tired from entering into their points of view. But it was all

stimulating, and he never failed in admiration of his daughter's

indomitable spirit. Even genius itself attended these gatherings now and

then, with its nose on one side; and June always introduced it to her

father. This, she felt, was exceptionally good for him, for genius was a

natural symptom he had never had--fond as she was of him.

Certain as a man can be that she was his own daughter, he often wondered

whence she got herself--her red-gold hair, now greyed into a special

colour; her direct, spirited face, so different from his own rather

folded and subtilised countenance, her little lithe figure, when he

and most of the Forsytes were tall. And he would dwell on the origin of

species, and debate whether she might be Danish or Celtic. Celtic, he

thought, from her pugnacity, and her taste in fillets and djibbahs. It

was not too much to say that he preferred her to the Age with which she

was surrounded, youthful though, for the greater part, it was. She took,

however, too much interest in his teeth, for he still had some of those

natural symptoms. Her dentist at once found "Staphylococcus aureus

present in pure culture" (which might cause boils, of course), and

wanted to take out all the teeth he had and supply him with two complete

sets of unnatural symptoms. Jolyon's native tenacity was roused, and in

the studio that evening he developed his objections. He had never

had any boils, and his own teeth would last his time. Of course--June

admitted--they would last his time if he didn't have them out! But if

he had more teeth he would have a better heart and his time would

be longer. His recalcitrance--she said--was a symptom of his whole

attitude; he was taking it lying down. He ought to be fighting. When was

he going to see the man who had cured Paul Post? Jolyon was very

sorry, but the fact was he was not going to see him. June chafed.

Pondridge--she said--the healer, was such a fine man, and he had such

difficulty in making two ends meet, and getting his theories recognised.

It was just such indifference and prejudice as her father manifested

which was keeping him back. It would be so splendid for both of them!

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

one stone."

"To cure, you mean!" cried June.

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

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

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

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

"That," said Jolyon, "is a fact, but I wish to remain hopeless as long

as possible. I shall let sleeping dogs lie, my child. They are quiet at

present."

"That's not giving science a chance," cried June. "You've no idea how

devoted Pondridge is. He puts his science before everything."

"Just," replied Jolyon, puffing the mild cigarette to which he was

reduced, "as Mr. Paul Post puts his art, eh? Art for Art's sake--Science

for the sake of Science. I know those enthusiastic egomaniac gentry.

They vivisect you without blinking. I'm enough of a Forsyte to give them

the go-by, June."

"Dad," said June, "if you only knew how old-fashioned that sounds!

Nobody can afford to be half-hearted nowadays."

"I'm afraid," murmured Jolyon, with his smile, "that's the only natural

symptom with which Mr. Pondridge need not supply me. We are born to be

extreme or to be moderate, my dear; though, if you'll forgive my saying

so, half the people nowadays who believe they're extreme are really very

moderate. I'm getting on as well as I can expect, and I must leave it at

that."

June was silent, having experienced in her time the inexorable character

of her father's amiable obstinacy so far as his own freedom of action

was concerned.

How he came to let her know why Irene had taken Jon to Spain puzzled

Jolyon, for he had little confidence in her discretion. After she had

brooded on the news, it brought a rather sharp discussion, during which

he perceived to the full the fundamental opposition between her active

temperament and his wife's passivity. He even gathered that a little

soreness still remained from that generation-old struggle between them

over the body of Philip Bosinney, in which the passive had so signally

triumphed over the active principle.

According to June, it was foolish and even cowardly to hide the past

from Jon. Sheer opportunism, she called it.

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

my dear."

"Oh!" cried June, "you don't really defend her for not telling Jon, Dad.

If it were left to you, you would."

"I might, but simply because I know he must find out, which will be

worse than if we told him."

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

"My dear," said Jolyon, "I wouldn't for the world go against Irene's

instinct. He's her boy."

"Yours too," cried June.

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

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

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

And that was all she got from him; but the matter rankled in her brain.

She could not bear sleeping dogs. And there stirred in her a tortuous

impulse to push the matter toward decision. Jon ought to be told, so

that either his feeling might be nipped in the bud, or, flowering in

spite of the past, come to fruition. And she determined to see Fleur,

and judge for herself. When June determined on anything, delicacy became

a somewhat minor consideration. After all, she was Soames' cousin, and

they were both interested in pictures. She would go and tell him that

he ought to buy a Paul Post, or perhaps a piece of sculpture by Boris

Strumolowski, and of course she would say nothing to her father. She

went on the following Sunday, looking so determined that she had some

difficulty in getting a cab at Reading station. The river country was

lovely in those days of her own month, and June ached at its loveliness.

She who had passed through this life without knowing what union was had

a love of natural beauty which was almost madness. And when she came to

that choice spot where Soames had pitched his tent, she dismissed her

cab, because, business over, she wanted to revel in the bright water

and the woods. She appeared at his front door, therefore, as a mere

pedestrian, and sent in her card. It was in June's character to know

that when her nerves were fluttering she was doing something worth

while. If one's nerves did not flutter, she was taking the line of

least resistance, and knew that nobleness was not obliging her. She

was conducted to a drawing-room, which, though not in her style, showed

every mark of fastidious elegance. Thinking, 'Too much taste--too many

knick-knacks,' she saw in an old lacquer-framed mirror the figure of

a girl coming in from the verandah. Clothed in white, and holding some

white roses in her hand, she had, reflected in that silvery-grey pool

of glass, a vision-like appearance, as if a pretty ghost had come out of

the green garden.

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

father's."

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

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

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

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

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

think of Jon?"

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

calmly:

"He's quite a nice boy."

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

"Not a bit."

'She's cool,' thought June.

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

get on?"

Confronted with the question she had advised her father to answer, June

was silent; whether because this girl was trying to get something out

of her, or simply because what one would do theoretically is not always

what one will do when it comes to the point.

"You know," said the girl, "the surest way to make people find out the

worst is to keep them ignorant. My father's told me it was a quarrel

about property. But I don't believe it; we've both got heaps. They

wouldn't have been so bourgeois as all that."

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

her.

"My grandfather," she said, "was very generous, and my father is, too;

neither of them was in the least bourgeois."

"Well, what was it then?" repeated the girl: Conscious that this young

Forsyte meant having what she wanted, June at once determined to prevent

her, and to get something for herself instead.

"Why do you want to know?"

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

tell me."

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

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

June's small and resolute face quivered. She was wearing a round cap,

and her hair had fluffed out under it. She looked quite young at that

moment, rejuvenated by encounter.

"You know," she said, "I saw you drop your handkerchief. Is there

anything between you and Jon? Because, if so, you'd better drop that

too."

The girl grew paler, but she smiled.

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

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

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

be frank."

"Did you come down to tell him that?"

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

"How delightful of you."

This girl could fence.

"I'm two and a half times your age," said June, "but I quite sympathize.

It's horrid not to have one's own way."

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

How the child stuck to her point

"It's not my secret. But I'll see what I can do, because I think both

you and Jon ought to be told. And now I'll say good-bye."

"Won't you wait and see Father?"

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

"I'll row you across."

"Look!" said June impulsively, "next time you're in London, come and see

me. This is where I live. I generally have young people in the evening.

But I shouldn't tell your father that you're coming."

The girl nodded.

Watching her scull the skiff across, June thought: 'She's awfully pretty

and well made. I never thought Soames would have a daughter as pretty as

this. She and Jon would make a lovely couple.

The instinct to couple, starved within herself, was always at work in

June. She stood watching Fleur row back; the girl took her hand off a

scull to wave farewell, and June walked languidly on between the meadows

and the river, with an ache in her heart. Youth to youth, like the

dragon-flies chasing each other, and love like the sun warming them

through and through. Her youth! So long ago--when Phil and she--And

since? Nothing--no one had been quite what she had wanted. And so she

had missed it all. But what a coil was round those two young things,

if they really were in love, as Holly would have it--as her father,

and Irene, and Soames himself seemed to dread. What a coil, and what a

barrier! And the itch for the future, the contempt, as it were, for what

was overpast, which forms the active principle, moved in the heart of

one who ever believed that what one wanted was more important than what

other people did not want. From the bank, awhile, in the warm summer

stillness, she watched the water-lily plants and willow leaves, the

fishes rising; sniffed the scent of grass and meadow-sweet, wondering

how she could force everybody to be happy. Jon and Fleur! Two little

lame ducks--charming callow yellow little ducks! A great pity! Surely

something could be done! One must not take such situations lying down.

She walked on, and reached a station, hot and cross.

That evening, faithful to the impulse toward direct action, which made

many people avoid her, she said to her father:

"Dad, I've been down to see young Fleur. I think she's very attractive.

It's no good hiding our heads under our wings, is it?"

The startled Jolyon set down his barley-water, and began crumbling his

bread.

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

daughter she is?"

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

Jolyon rose.

"Certain things can never be buried."

"I disagree," said June. "It's that which stands in the way of all

happiness and progress. You don't understand the Age, Dad. It's got no

use for outgrown things. Why do you think it matters so terribly that

Jon should know about his mother? Who pays any attention to that sort of

thing now? The marriage laws are just as they were when Soames and Irene

couldn't get a divorce, and you had to come in. We've moved, and they

haven't. So nobody cares. Marriage without a decent chance of relief

is only a sort of slave-owning; people oughtn't to own each other.

Everybody sees that now. If Irene broke such laws, what does it matter?"

"It's not for me to disagree there," said Jolyon; "but that's all quite

beside the mark. This is a matter of human feeling."

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

things."

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

nonsense."

"I'm not. If they prove to be really fond of each other, why should they

be made unhappy because of the past?"

"You haven't lived that past. I have--through the feelings of my wife;

through my own nerves and my imagination, as only one who is devoted

can."

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

"If," she said suddenly, "she were the daughter of Philip Bosinney, I

could understand you better. Irene loved him, she never loved Soames."

Jolyon uttered a deep sound-the sort of noise an Italian peasant woman

utters to her mule. His heart had begun beating furiously, but he paid

no attention to it, quite carried away by his feelings.

"That shows how little you understand. Neither I nor Jon, if I know him,

would mind a love-past. It's the brutality of a union without love.

This girl is the daughter of the man who once owned Jon's mother as a

negro-slave was owned. You can't lay that ghost; don't try to, June!

It's asking us to see Jon joined to the flesh and blood of the man who

possessed Jon's mother against her will. It's no good mincing words; I

want it clear once for all. And now I mustn't talk any more, or I shall

have to sit up with this all night." And, putting his hand over his

heart, Jolyon turned his back on his daughter and stood looking at the

river Thames.

June, who by nature never saw a hornet's nest until she had put her head

into it, was seriously alarmed. She came and slipped her arm through

his. Not convinced that he was right, and she herself wrong, because

that was not natural to her, she was yet profoundly impressed by the

obvious fact that the subject was very bad for him. She rubbed her cheek

against his shoulder, and said nothing.

After taking her elderly cousin across, Fleur did not land at once, but

pulled in among the reeds, into the sunshine. The peaceful beauty of

the afternoon seduced for a little one not much given to the vague and

poetic. In the field beyond the bank where her skiff lay up, a machine

drawn by a grey horse was turning an early field of hay. She watched the

grass cascading over and behind the light wheels with fascination--it

looked so cool and fresh. The click and swish blended with the rustle of

the willows and the poplars, and the cooing of a wood-pigeon, in a

true river song. Alongside, in the deep green water, weeds, like yellow

snakes, were writhing and nosing with the current; pied cattle on the

farther side stood in the shade lazily swishing their tails. It was

an afternoon to dream. And she took out Jon's letters--not flowery

effusions, but haunted in their recital of things seen and done by a

longing very agreeable to her, and all ending "Your devoted J." Fleur

was not sentimental, her desires were ever concrete and concentrated,

but what poetry there was in the daughter of Soames and Annette had

certainly in those weeks of waiting gathered round her memories of Jon.

They all belonged to grass and blossom, flowers and running water. She

enjoyed him in the scents absorbed by her crinkling nose. The stars

could persuade her that she was standing beside him in the centre of the

map of Spain; and of an early morning the dewy cobwebs, the hazy sparkle

and promise of the day down in the garden, were Jon personified to her.

Two white swans came majestically by, while she was reading his letters,

followed by their brood of six young swans in a line, with just so much

water between each tail and head, a flotilla of grey destroyers. Fleur

thrust her letters back, got out her sculls, and pulled up to the

landing-stage. Crossing the lawn, she wondered whether she should tell

her father of June's visit. If he learned of it from the butler, he

might think it odd if she did not. It gave her, too, another chance to

startle out of him the reason of the feud. She went, therefore, up the

road to meet him.

Soames had gone to look at a patch of ground on which the Local

Authorities were proposing to erect a Sanatorium for people with weak

lungs. Faithful to his native individualism, he took no part in local

affairs, content to pay the rates which were always going up. He could

not, however, remain indifferent to this new and dangerous scheme. The

site was not half a mile from his own house. He was quite of opinion

that the country should stamp out tuberculosis; but this was not the

place. It should be done farther away. He took, indeed, an attitude

common to all true Forsytes, that disability of any sort in other

people was not his affair, and the State should do its business without

prejudicing in any way the natural advantages which he had acquired or

inherited. Francie, the most free-spirited Forsyte of his generation

(except perhaps that fellow Jolyon) had once asked him in her malicious

way: "Did you ever see the name Forsyte in a subscription list,

Soames?" That was as it might be, but a Sanatorium would depreciate the

neighbourhood, and he should certainly sign the petition which was being

got up against it. Returning with this decision fresh within him, he saw

Fleur coming.

She was showing him more affection of late, and the quiet time down here

with her in this summer weather had been making him feel quite young;

Annette was always running up to Town for one thing or another, so that

he had Fleur to himself almost as much as he could wish. To be sure,

young Mont had formed a habit of appearing on his motor-cycle almost

every other day. Thank goodness, the young fellow had shaved off his

half-toothbrushes, and no longer looked like a mountebank! With a girl

friend of Fleur's who was staying in the house, and a neighbouring youth

or so, they made two couples after dinner, in the hall, to the music

of the electric pianola, which performed Fox-trots unassisted, with a

surprised shine on its expressive surface. Annette, even, now and then

passed gracefully up and down in the arms of one or other of the young

men. And Soames, coming to the drawing-room door, would lift his nose

a little sideways, and watch them, waiting to catch a smile from Fleur;

then move back to his chair by the drawing-room hearth, to peruse The

Times or some other collector's price list. To his ever-anxious eyes

Fleur showed no signs of remembering that caprice of hers.

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

arm.

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

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

"Your cousin, June Forsyte."

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

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

"Feud? What feud?"

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

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

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

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

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

"And the daughter of your enemy."

"What d'you mean by that?"

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

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

get your notions."

"From June Forsyte."

It had come to her as an inspiration that if he thought she knew, or

were on the edge of knowledge, he would tell her.

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

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

Fleur saw that she had overreached herself.

"I don't want to plague you, darling. As you say, why want to know more?

Why want to know anything of that 'small' mystery--Je m'en fiche, as

Profond says?"

"That chap!" said Soames profoundly.

That chap, indeed, played a considerable, if invisible, part this

summer--for he had not turned up again. Ever since the Sunday when Fleur

had drawn attention to him prowling on the lawn, Soames had thought of

him a good deal, and always in connection with Annette, for no reason,

except that she was looking handsomer than for some time past. His

possessive instinct, subtle, less formal, more elastic since the War,

kept all misgiving underground. As one looks on some American river,

quiet and pleasant, knowing that an alligator perhaps is lying in the

mud with his snout just raised and indistinguishable from a snag of

wood--so Soames looked on the river of his own existence, subconscious

of Monsieur Profond, refusing to see more than the suspicion of his

snout. He had at this epoch in his life practically all he wanted, and

was as nearly happy as his nature would permit. His senses were at

rest; his affections found all the vent they needed in his daughter;

his collection was well known, his money well invested; his health

excellent, save for a touch of liver now and again; he had not yet begun

to worry seriously about what would happen after death, inclining to

think that nothing would happen. He resembled one of his own gilt-edged

securities, and to knock the gilt off by seeing anything he could avoid

seeing would be, he felt instinctively, perverse and retrogressive.

Those two crumpled rose-leaves, Fleur's caprice and Monsieur Profond's

snout, would level away if he lay on them industriously.

That evening Chance, which visits the lives of even the best-invested

Forsytes, put a clue into Fleur's hands. Her father came down to dinner

without a handkerchief, and had occasion to blow his nose.

"I'll get you one, dear," she had said, and ran upstairs. In the sachet

where she sought for it--an old sachet of very faded silk--there were

two compartments: one held handkerchiefs; the other was buttoned,

and contained something flat and hard. By some childish impulse Fleur

unbuttoned it. There was a frame and in it a photograph of herself as

a little girl. She gazed at it, fascinated, as one is by one's own

presentment. It slipped under her fidgeting thumb, and she saw that

another photograph was behind. She pressed her own down further, and

perceived a face, which she seemed to know, of a young woman, very

good-looking, in a very old style of evening dress. Slipping her own

photograph up over it again, she took out a handkerchief and went down.

Only on the stairs did she identify that face. Surely--surely Jon's

mother! The conviction came as a shock. And she stood still in a flurry

of thought. Why, of course! Jon's father had married the woman her

father had wanted to marry, had cheated him out of her, perhaps. Then,

afraid of showing by her manner that she had lighted on his secret,

she refused to think further, and, shaking out the silk handkerchief,

entered the dining-room.

"I chose the softest, Father."

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

That evening passed for Fleur in putting two and two together; recalling

the look on her father's face in the confectioner's shop--a look strange

and coldly intimate, a queer look. He must have loved that woman very

much to have kept her photograph all this time, in spite of having lost

her. Unsparing and matter-of-fact, her mind darted to his relations with

her own mother. Had he ever really loved her? She thought not. Jon was

the son of the woman he had really loved. Surely, then, he ought not to

mind his daughter loving him; it only wanted getting used to. And a sigh

of sheer relief was caught in the folds of her nightgown slipping over

her head.

III.--MEETINGS

Youth only recognises Age by fits and starts. Jon, for one, had never

really seen his father's age till he came back from Spain. The face of

the fourth Jolyon, worn by waiting, gave him quite a shock--it looked

so wan and old. His father's mask had been forced awry by the emotion

of the meeting, so that the boy suddenly realised how much he must have

felt their absence. He summoned to his aid the thought: 'Well, I didn't

want to go!' It was out of date for Youth to defer to Age. But Jon was

by no means typically modern. His father had always been "so jolly" to

him, and to feel that one meant to begin again at once the conduct which

his father had suffered six weeks' loneliness to cure was not agreeable.

At the question, "Well, old man, how did the great Goya strike you?" his

conscience pricked him badly. The great Goya only existed because he had

created a face which resembled Fleur's.

On the night of their return, he went to bed full of compunction;

but awoke full of anticipation. It was only the fifth of July, and no

meeting was fixed with Fleur until the ninth. He was to have three days

at home before going back to farm. Somehow he must contrive to see her!

In the lives of men an inexorable rhythm, caused by the need for

trousers, not even the fondest parents can deny. On the second day,

therefore, Jon went to Town, and having satisfied his conscience by

ordering what was indispensable in Conduit Street, turned his face

toward Piccadilly. Stratton Street, where her Club was, adjoined

Devonshire House. It would be the merest chance that she should be at

her Club. But he dawdled down Bond Street with a beating heart, noticing

the superiority of all other young men to himself. They wore their

clothes with such an air; they had assurance; they were old. He was

suddenly overwhelmed by the conviction that Fleur must have forgotten

him. Absorbed in his own feeling for her all these weeks, he had mislaid

that possibility. The corners of his mouth drooped, his hands felt

clammy. Fleur with the pick of youth at the beck of her smile-Fleur

incomparable! It was an evil moment. Jon, however, had a great idea that

one must be able to face anything. And he braced himself with that dour

reflection in front of a bric-a-brac shop. At this high-water mark of

what was once the London season, there was nothing to mark it out from

any other except a grey top hat or two, and the sun. Jon moved on, and

turning the corner into Piccadilly, ran into Val Dartie moving toward

the Iseeum Club, to which he had just been elected.

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

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

Val looked him up and down. "That's good! I'm going in here to order

some cigarettes; then come and have some lunch."

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

The condition of England, that nightmare of its Press and Public men,

was seen in different perspective within the tobacconist's which they

now entered.

"Yes, sir; precisely the cigarette I used to supply your father with.

Bless me! Mr. Montague Dartie was a customer here from--let me see--the

year Melton won the Derby. One of my very best customers he was." A

faint smile illumined the tobacconist's face. "Many's the tip he's given

me, to be sure! I suppose he took a couple of hundred of these every

week, year in, year out, and never changed his cigarette. Very affable

gentleman, brought me a lot of custom. I was sorry he met with that

accident. One misses an old customer like him."

Val smiled. His father's decease had closed an account which had been

running longer, probably, than any other; and in a ring of smoke

puffed out from that time-honoured cigarette he seemed to see again his

father's face, dark, good-looking, moustachioed, a little puffy, in the

only halo it had earned. His father had his fame here, anyway--a man

who smoked two hundred cigarettes a week, who could give tips, and

run accounts for ever! To his tobacconist a hero! Even that was some

distinction to inherit!

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

"To his son, sir, and cash--ten and six. I shall never forget Mr.

Montague Dartie. I've known him stand talkin' to me half an hour. We

don't get many like him now, with everybody in such a hurry. The War was

bad for manners, sir--it was bad for manners. You were in it, I see."

"No," said Val, tapping his knee, "I got this in the war before. Saved

my life, I expect. Do you want any cigarettes, Jon?"

Rather ashamed, Jon murmured, "I don't smoke, you know," and saw the

tobacconist's lips twisted, as if uncertain whether to say "Good God!"

or "Now's your chance, sir!"

"That's right," said Val; "keep off it while you can. You'll want it

when you take a knock. This is really the same tobacco, then?"

"Identical, sir; a little dearer, that's all. Wonderful staying

power--the British Empire, I always say."

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

Come on, Jon."

Jon entered the Iseeum with curiosity. Except to lunch now and then at

the Hotch-Potch with his father, he had never been in a London Club. The

Iseeum, comfortable and unpretentious, did not move, could not, so long

as George Forsyte sat on its Committee, where his culinary acumen was

almost the controlling force. The Club had made a stand against the

newly rich, and it had taken all George Forsyte's prestige, and praise

of him as a "good sportsman," to bring in Prosper Profond.

The two were lunching together when the half-brothers-in-law entered

the dining-room, and attracted by George's forefinger, sat down at their

table, Val with his shrewd eyes and charming smile, Jon with solemn lips

and an attractive shyness in his glance. There was an air of privilege

around that corner table, as though past masters were eating there.

Jon was fascinated by the hypnotic atmosphere. The waiter, lean in the

chaps, pervaded with such free-masonical deference. He seemed to hang

on George Forsyte's lips, to watch the gloat in his eye with a kind

of sympathy, to follow the movements of the heavy club-marked silver

fondly. His liveried arm and confidential voice alarmed Jon, they came

so secretly over his shoulder.

Except for George's "Your grandfather tipped me once; he was a deuced

good judge of a cigar!" neither he nor the other past master took any

notice of him, and he was grateful for this. The talk was all about the

breeding, points, and prices of horses, and he listened to it vaguely

at first, wondering how it was possible to retain so much knowledge in a

head. He could not take his eyes off the dark past master--what he said

was so deliberate and discouraging--such heavy, queer, smiled-out words.

Jon was thinking of butterflies, when he heard him say:

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

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

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

went on.

"His daughter's an attractive small girl. Mr. Soames Forsyde is a bit

old-fashioned. I want to see him have a pleasure some day." George

Forsyte grinned.

"Don't you worry; he's not so miserable as he looks. He'll never show

he's enjoying anything--they might try and take it from him. Old Soames!

Once bit, twice shy!"

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

coffee."

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

"Old George Forsyte is a first cousin of your father's and of my Uncle

Soames. He's always been here. The other chap, Profond, is a queer fish.

I think he's hanging round Soames' wife, if you ask me!"

Jon looked at him, startled. "But that's awful," he said: "I mean--for

Fleur."

"Don't suppose Fleur cares very much; she's very up-to-date."

"Her mother!"

"You're very green, Jon."

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

"You're right," said Val suddenly; "but things aren't what they were

when I was your age. There's a 'To-morrow we die' feeling. That's

what old George meant about my Uncle Soames. He doesn't mean to die

to-morrow."

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

"Stable secret, Jon. Take my advice, and bottle up. You'll do no good by

knowing. Have a liqueur?"

Jon shook his head.

"I hate the way people keep things from one," he muttered, "and then

sneer at one for being green."

"Well, you can ask Holly. If she won't tell you, you'll believe it's for

your own good, I suppose."

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

Val smiled up at him half-sorry, and yet amused. The boy looked so

upset.

"All right! See you on Friday."

"I don't know," murmured Jon.

And he did not. This conspiracy of silence made him desperate. It was

humiliating to be treated like a child! He retraced his moody steps

to Stratton Street. But he would go to her Club now, and find out the

worst! To his enquiry the reply was that Miss Forsyte was not in the

Club. She might be in perhaps later. She was often in on Monday--they

could not say. Jon said he would call again, and, crossing into the

Green Park, flung himself down under a tree. The sun was bright, and a

breeze fluttered the leaves of the young lime-tree beneath which he lay;

but his heart ached. Such darkness seemed gathered round his happiness.

He heard Big Ben chime "Three" above the traffic. The sound moved

something in him, and, taking out a piece of paper, he began to scribble

on it with a pencil. He had jotted a stanza, and was searching the grass

for another verse, when something hard touched his shoulder-a green

parasol. There above him stood Fleur!

"They told me you'd been, and were coming back. So I thought you might

be out here; and you are--it's rather wonderful!"

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

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

Jon seized her arm.

"It's too much luck! Let's get away from this side." He almost dragged

her on through that too thoughtfully regulated Park, to find some cover

where they could sit and hold each other's hands.

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

suspense above her cheeks.

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

Jon felt a twitch of compassion for the-young idiot.

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

"Really! Was it interesting?"

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

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

families, Jon."

His heart began beating very fast.

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

her instead."

"Oh!"

"I came on a photo of her; it was in a frame behind a photo of me. Of

course, if he was very fond of her, that would have made him pretty mad,

wouldn't it?"

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

"But suppose they were engaged?"

"If we were engaged, and you found you loved somebody better, I might go

cracked, but I shouldn't grudge it you."

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

"My God! Not much!"

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

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

"You see, we don't know," went on Fleur; "it may have been a great

shock. She may have behaved badly to him. People do."

"My mother wouldn't."

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. "I don't think we know much about our

fathers and mothers. We just see them in the light of the way they

treat us; but they've treated other people, you know, before we were

born-plenty, I expect. You see, they're both old. Look at your father,

with three separate families!"

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

can be alone?"

"Only a taxi."

"Let's get one, then."

When they were installed, Fleur asked suddenly: "Are you going back to

Robin Hill? I should like to see where you live, Jon. I'm staying

with my aunt for the night, but I could get back in time for dinner. I

wouldn't come to the house, of course."

Jon gazed at her enraptured.

"Splendid! I can show it you from the copse, we shan't meet anybody.

There's a train at four."

The god of property and his Forsytes great and small, leisured,

official, commercial, or professional, like the working classes,

still worked their seven hours a day, so that those two of the fourth

generation travelled down to Robin Hill in an empty first-class

carriage, dusty and sun-warmed, of that too early train. They travelled

in blissful silence, holding each other's hands.

At the station they saw no one except porters, and a villager or two

unknown to Jon, and walked out up the lane, which smelled of dust and

honeysuckle.

For Jon--sure of her now, and without separation before him--it was a

miraculous dawdle, more wonderful than those on the Downs, or along the

river Thames. It was love-in-a-mist--one of those illumined pages of

Life, where every word and smile, and every light touch they gave each

other were as little gold and red and blue butterflies and flowers

and birds scrolled in among the text--a happy communing, without

afterthought, which lasted thirty-seven minutes. They reached the

coppice at the milking hour. Jon would not take her as far as the

farmyard; only to where she could see the field leading up to the

gardens, and the house beyond. They turned in among the larches, and

suddenly, at the winding of the path, came on Irene, sitting on an old

log seat.

There are various kinds of shocks: to the vertebrae; to the nerves; to

moral sensibility; and, more potent and permanent, to personal dignity.

This last was the shock Jon received, coming thus on his mother. He

became suddenly conscious that he was doing an indelicate thing. To have

brought Fleur down openly--yes! But to sneak her in like this! Consumed

with shame, he put on a front as brazen as his nature would permit.

Fleur was smiling, a little defiantly; his mother's startled face was

changing quickly to the impersonal and gracious. It was she who uttered

the first words:

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

down to us."

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

to see where I lived."

His mother said quietly:

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

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

Fleur answer:

"Thanks very much; I have to get back to dinner. I met Jon by accident,

and we thought it would be rather jolly just to see his home."

How self-possessed she was!

"Of course; but you must have tea. We'll send you down to the station.

My husband will enjoy seeing you."

The expression of his mother's eyes, resting on him for a moment, cast

Jon down level with the ground--a true worm. Then she led on, and Fleur

followed her. He felt like a child, trailing after those two, who were

talking so easily about Spain and Wansdon, and the house up there beyond

the trees and the grassy slope. He watched the fencing of their eyes,

taking each other in--the two beings he loved most in the world.

He could see his father sitting under the oaktree; and suffered in

advance all the loss of caste he must go through in the eyes of that

tranquil figure, with his knees crossed, thin, old, and elegant; already

he could feel the faint irony which would come into his voice and smile.

"This is Fleur Forsyte, Jolyon; Jon brought her down to see the house.

Let's have tea at once--she has to catch a train. Jon, tell them, dear,

and telephone to the Dragon for a car."

To leave her alone with them was strange, and yet, as no doubt his

mother had foreseen, the least of evils at the moment; so he ran up into

the house. Now he would not see Fleur alone again--not for a minute, and

they had arranged no further meeting! When he returned under cover of

the maids and teapots, there was not a trace of awkwardness beneath the

tree; it was all within himself, but not the less for that. They were

talking of the Gallery off Cork Street.

"We back numbers," his father was saying, "are awfully anxious to find

out why we can't appreciate the new stuff; you and Jon must tell us."

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

He saw his father's smile.

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

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

grimness.

"The young are tired of us, our gods and our ideals. Off with their

heads, they say--smash their idols! And let's get back to-nothing! And,

by Jove, they've done it! Jon's a poet. He'll be going in, too, and

stamping on what's left of us. Property, beauty, sentiment--all smoke.

We mustn't own anything nowadays, not even our feelings. They stand in

the way of--Nothing."

Jon listened, bewildered, almost outraged by his father's words, behind

which he felt a meaning that he could not reach. He didn't want to stamp

on anything!

"Nothing's the god of to-day," continued Jolyon; "we're back where the

Russians were sixty years ago, when they started Nihilism."

"No, Dad," cried Jon suddenly, "we only want to live, and we don't know

how, because of the Past--that's all!"

"By George!" said Jolyon, "that's profound, Jon. Is it your own? The

Past! Old ownerships, old passions, and their aftermath. Let's have

cigarettes."

Conscious that his mother had lifted her hand to her lips, quickly, as

if to hush something, Jon handed the cigarettes. He lighted his father's

and Fleur's, then one for himself. Had he taken the knock that Val had

spoken of? The smoke was blue when he had not puffed, grey when he had;

he liked the sensation in his nose, and the sense of equality it gave

him. He was glad no one said: "So you've begun!" He felt less young.

Fleur looked at her watch, and rose. His mother went with her into the

house. Jon stayed with his father, puffing at the cigarette.

"See her into the car, old man," said Jolyon; "and when she's gone, ask

your mother to come back to me."

Jon went. He waited in the hall. He saw her into the car. There was no

chance for any word; hardly for a pressure of the hand. He waited all

that evening for something to be said to him. Nothing was said. Nothing

might have happened. He went up to bed, and in the mirror on his

dressing-table met himself. He did not speak, nor did the image; but

both looked as if they thought the more.

IV.--IN GREEN STREET

Uncertain whether the impression that Prosper Profond was dangerous

should be traced to his attempt to give Val the Mayfly filly; to a

remark of Fleur's: "He's like the hosts of Midian--he prowls and prowls

around"; to his preposterous inquiry of Jack Cardigan: "What's the use

of keepin' fit?" or, more simply, to the fact that he was a foreigner,

or alien as it was now called. Certain, that Annette was looking

particularly handsome, and that Soames--had sold him a Gauguin and then

torn up the cheque, so that Monsieur Profond himself had said: "I didn't

get that small picture I bought from Mr. Forsyde."

However suspiciously regarded, he still frequented Winifred's evergreen

little house in Green Street, with a good-natured obtuseness which no

one mistook for naivete, a word hardly applicable to Monsieur Prosper

Profond. Winifred still found him "amusing," and would write him little

notes saying: "Come and have a 'jolly' with us"--it was breath of life

to her to keep up with the phrases of the day.

The mystery, with which all felt him to be surrounded, was due to his

having done, seen, heard, and known everything, and found nothing

in it--which was unnatural. The English type of disillusionment was

familiar enough to Winifred, who had always moved in fashionable

circles. It gave a certain cachet or distinction, so that one got

something out of it. But to see nothing in anything, not as a pose, but

because there was nothing in anything, was not English; and that which

was not English one could not help secretly feeling dangerous, if not

precisely bad form. It was like having the mood which the War had left,

seated--dark, heavy, smiling, indifferent--in your Empire chair; it

was like listening to that mood talking through thick pink lips above

a little diabolic beard. It was, as Jack Cardigan expressed it--for the

English character at large--"a bit too thick"--for if nothing was really

worth getting excited about, there were always games, and one could

make it so! Even Winifred, ever a Forsyte at heart, felt that there

was nothing to be had out of such a mood of disillusionment, so that it

really ought not to be there. Monsieur Profond, in fact, made the mood

too plain in a country which decently veiled such realities.

When Fleur, after her hurried return from Robin Hill, came down to

dinner that evening, the mood was standing at the window of Winifred's

little drawing-room, looking out into Green Street, with an air of

seeing nothing in it. And Fleur gazed promptly into the fireplace with

an air of seeing a fire which was not there.

Monsieur Profond came from the window. He was in full fig, with a white

waistcoat and a white flower in his buttonhole.

"Well, Miss Forsyde," he said, "I'm awful pleased to see you. Mr.

Forsyde well? I was sayin' to-day I want to see him have some pleasure.

He worries."

"You think so?" said Fleur shortly.

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

Fleur spun round. "Shall I tell you," she said, "what would give him

pleasure?" But the words, "To hear that you had cleared out," died at

the expression on his face. All his fine white teeth were showing.

"I was hearin' at the Club to-day about his old trouble." Fleur opened

her eyes. "What do you mean?"

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

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

Though conscious that he had cleverly diverted her from his own share

in her father's worry, Fleur was unable to withstand a rush of nervous

curiosity. "Tell me what you heard."

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

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

wrong."

"His first wife," murmured Monsieur Profond.

Choking back the words, "He was never married before," she said: "Well,

what about her?"

"Mr. George Forsyde was tellin' me about your father's first wife

marryin' his cousin Jolyon afterward. It was a small bit unpleasant, I

should think. I saw their boy--nice boy!"

Fleur looked up. Monsieur Profond was swimming, heavily diabolical,

before her. That--the reason! With the most heroic effort of her life

so far, she managed to arrest that swimming figure. She could not tell

whether he had noticed. And just then Winifred came in.

"Oh! here you both are already; Imogen and I have had the most amusing

afternoon at the Babies' bazaar."

"What babies?" said Fleur mechanically.

"The 'Save the Babies.' I got such a bargain, my dear. A piece of

old Armenian work--from before the Flood. I want your opinion on it,

Prosper."

"Auntie," whispered Fleur suddenly.

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

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

Monsieur Profond had withdrawn into the window, where he was practically

out of hearing.

"Auntie, he-he told me that father has been married before. Is it true

that he divorced her, and she married Jon Forsyte's father?"

Never in all the life of the mother of four little Darties had Winifred

felt more seriously embarrassed. Her niece's face was so pale, her eyes

so dark, her voice so whispery and strained.

"Your father didn't wish you to hear," she said, with all the aplomb she

could muster. "These things will happen. I've often told him he ought to

let you know."

"Oh!" said Fleur, and that was all, but it made Winifred pat her

shoulder--a firm little shoulder, nice and white! She never could help

an appraising eye and touch in the matter of her niece, who would have

to be married, of course--though not to that boy Jon.

"We've forgotten all about it years and years ago," she said

comfortably. "Come and have dinner!"

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

"My dear!" murmured Winifred, concerned, "you're not taking this to

heart? Why, you haven't properly come out yet! That boy's a child!"

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

to-night."

"Well, well," said Winifred, "go and lie down. I'll send you some

bromide, and I shall talk to Prosper Profond. What business had he to

gossip? Though I must say I think it's much better you should know."

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

She went up with her head whirling, a dry sensation in her throat, a

guttered frightened feeling in her breast. Never in her life as yet had

she suffered from even momentary fear that she would not get what she

had set her heart on. The sensations of the afternoon had been full

and poignant, and this gruesome discovery coming on the top of them

had really made her head ache. No wonder her father had hidden that

photograph, so secretly behind her own-ashamed of having kept it! But

could he hate Jon's mother and yet keep her photograph? She pressed her

hands over her forehead, trying to see things clearly. Had they told

Jon--had her visit to Robin Hill forced them to tell him? Everything now

turned on that! She knew, they all knew, except--perhaps--Jon!

She walked up and down, biting her lip and thinking desperately hard.

Jon loved his mother. If they had told him, what would he do? She could

not tell. But if they had not told him, should she not--could she not

get him for herself--get married to him, before he knew? She searched

her memories of Robin Hill. His mother's face so passive--with its dark

eyes and as if powdered hair, its reserve, its smile--baffled her; and

his father's--kindly, sunken, ironic. Instinctively she felt they would

shrink from telling Jon, even now, shrink from hurting him--for of

course it would hurt him awfully to know!

Her aunt must be made not to tell her father that she knew. So long as

neither she herself nor Jon were supposed to know, there was still a

chance--freedom to cover one's tracks, and get what her heart was set

on. But she was almost overwhelmed by her isolation. Every one's hand

was against her--every one's! It was as Jon had said--he and she just

wanted to live and the past was in their way, a past they hadn't shared

in, and didn't understand! Oh! What a shame! And suddenly she thought

of June. Would she help them? For somehow June had left on her the

impression that she would be sympathetic with their love, impatient of

obstacle. Then, instinctively, she thought: 'I won't give anything away,

though, even to her. I daren't. I mean to have Jon; against them all.'

Soup was brought up to her, and one of Winifred's pet headache cachets.

She swallowed both. Then Winifred herself appeared. Fleur opened her

campaign with the words:

"You know, Auntie, I do wish people wouldn't think I'm in love with that

boy. Why, I've hardly seen him!"

Winifred, though experienced, was not "fine." She accepted the remark

with considerable relief. Of course, it was not pleasant for the girl to

hear of the family scandal, and she set herself to minimise the matter,

a task for which she was eminently qualified, "raised" fashionably under

a comfortable mother and a father whose nerves might not be shaken,

and for many years the wife of Montague Dartie. Her description was a

masterpiece of understatement. Fleur's father's first wife had been very

foolish. There had been a young man who had got run over, and she

had left Fleur's father. Then, years after, when it might all have

come--right again, she had taken up with their cousin Jolyon; and, of

course, her father had been obliged to have a divorce. Nobody remembered

anything of it now, except just the family. And, perhaps, it had all

turned out for the best; her father had Fleur; and Jolyon and Irene had

been quite happy, they said, and their boy was a nice boy. "Val having

Holly, too, is a sort of plaster, don't you know?" With these soothing

words, Winifred patted her niece's shoulder; thought: 'She's a nice,

plump little thing!' and went back to Prosper Profond, who, in spite of

his indiscretion, was very "amusing" this evening.

For some minutes after her aunt had gone Fleur remained under influence

of bromide material and spiritual. But then reality came back. Her aunt

had left out all that mattered--all the feeling, the hate, the love, the

unforgivingness of passionate hearts. She, who knew so little of life,

and had touched only the fringe of love, was yet aware by instinct that

words have as little relation to fact and feeling as coin to the bread

it buys. 'Poor Father!' she thought. 'Poor me! Poor Jon! But I don't

care, I mean to have him!' From the window of her darkened room she saw

"that man" issue from the door below and "prowl" away. If he and her

mother--how would that affect her chance? Surely it must make her

father cling to her more closely, so that he would consent in the end

to anything she wanted, or become reconciled the sooner to what she did

without his knowledge.

She took some earth from the flower-box in the window, and with all her

might flung it after that disappearing figure. It fell short, but the

action did her good.

And a little puff of air came up from Green Street, smelling of petrol,

not sweet.

V.--PURELY FORSYTE AFFAIRS

Soames, coming up to the City, with the intention of calling in at

Green Street at the end of his day and taking Fleur back home with

him, suffered from rumination. Sleeping partner that he was, he seldom

visited the City now, but he still had a room of his own at Cuthcott,

Kingson and Forsyte's, and one special clerk and a half assigned to the

management of purely Forsyte affairs. They were somewhat in flux just

now--an auspicious moment for the disposal of house property. And Soames

was unloading the estates of his father and Uncle Roger, and to some

extent of his Uncle Nicholas. His shrewd and matter-of-course probity in

all money concerns had made him something of an autocrat in connection

with these trusts. If Soames thought this or thought that, one had

better save oneself the bother of thinking too. He guaranteed, as it

were, irresponsibility to numerous Forsytes of the third and fourth

generations. His fellow trustees, such as his cousins Roger or Nicholas,

his cousins-in-law Tweetyman and Spender, or his sister Cicely's

husband, all trusted him; he signed first, and where he signed first

they signed after, and nobody was a penny the worse. Just now they were

all a good many pennies the better, and Soames was beginning to see

the close of certain trusts, except for distribution of the income from

securities as gilt-edged as was compatible with the period.

Passing the more feverish parts of the City toward the most perfect

backwater in London, he ruminated. Money was extraordinarily tight;

and morality extraordinarily loose! The War had done it. Banks were

not lending; people breaking contracts all over the place. There was a

feeling in the air and a look on faces that he did not like. The

country seemed in for a spell of gambling and bankruptcies. There

was satisfaction in the thought that neither he nor his trusts had

an investment which could be affected by anything less maniacal than

national repudiation or a levy on capital. If Soames had faith, it was

in what he called "English common sense"--or the power to have things,

if not one way then another. He might--like his father James before

him--say he didn't know what things were coming to, but he never in his

heart believed they were. If it rested with him, they wouldn't--and,

after all, he was only an Englishman like any other, so quietly

tenacious of what he had that he knew he would never really part with

it without something more or less equivalent in exchange. His mind was

essentially equilibristic in material matters, and his way of putting

the national situation difficult to refute in a world composed of human

beings. Take his own case, for example! He was well off. Did that do

anybody harm? He did not eat ten meals a day; he ate no more than,

perhaps not so much as, a poor man. He spent no money on vice; breathed

no more air, used no more water to speak of than the mechanic or the

porter. He certainly had pretty things about him, but they had given

employment in the making, and somebody must use them. He bought

pictures, but Art must be encouraged. He was, in fact, an accidental

channel through which money flowed, employing labour. What was there

objectionable in that? In his charge money was in quicker and more

useful flux than it would be in charge of the State and a lot of

slow-fly money-sucking officials. And as to what he saved each year--it

was just as much in flux as what he didn't save, going into Water Board

or Council Stocks, or something sound and useful. The State paid him no

salary for being trustee of his own or other people's money he did

all that for nothing. Therein lay the whole case against

nationalisation--owners of private property were unpaid, and yet had

every incentive to quicken up the flux. Under nationalisation--just the

opposite! In a country smarting from officialism he felt that he had a

strong case.

It particularly annoyed him, entering that backwater of perfect peace,

to think that a lot of unscrupulous Trusts and Combinations had been

cornering the market in goods of all kinds, and keeping prices at an

artificial height. Such abusers of the individualistic system were the

ruffians who caused all the trouble, and it was some satisfaction to see

them getting into a stew at last lest the whole thing might come down

with a run--and land them in the soup.

The offices of Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte occupied the ground and

first floors of a house on the right-hand side; and, ascending to his

room, Soames thought: 'Time we had a coat of paint.'

His old clerk Gradman was seated, where he always was, at a huge bureau

with countless pigeonholes. Half-the-clerk stood beside him, with a

broker's note recording investment of the proceeds from sale of the

Bryanston Square house, in Roger Forsyte's estate. Soames took it, and

said:

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

With a sort of grating ingratiation old Gradman answered him:

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

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

his hat.

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

Old Gradman, moving to the limit of his swivel chair, drew out two

drafts from the bottom lefthand drawer. Recovering his body, he raised

his grizzle-haired face, very red from stooping.

"Copies, Sir."

Soames took them. It struck him suddenly how like Gradman was to the

stout brindled yard dog they had been wont to keep on his chain at

The Shelter, till one day Fleur had come and insisted it should be let

loose, so that it had at once bitten the cook and been destroyed. If you

let Gradman off his chain, would he bite the cook?

Checking this frivolous fancy, Soames unfolded his Marriage Settlement.

He had not looked at it for over eighteen years, not since he remade his

Will when his father died and Fleur was born. He wanted to see whether

the words "during coverture" were in. Yes, they were--odd expression,

when you thought of it, and derived perhaps from horse-breeding!

Interest on fifteen thousand pounds (which he paid her without deducting

income tax) so long as she remained his wife, and afterward during

widowhood "dum casta"--old-fashioned and rather pointed words, put in to

insure the conduct of Fleur's mother. His Will made it up to an annuity

of a thousand under the same conditions. All right! He returned the

copies to Gradman, who took them without looking up, swung the chair,

restored the papers to their drawer, and went on casting up.

"Gradman! I don't like the condition of the country; there are a lot of

people about without any common sense. I want to find a way by which I

can safeguard Miss Fleur against anything which might arise."

Gradman wrote the figure "2" on his blotting-paper.

"Ye-es," he said; "there's a nahsty spirit."

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

"Nao," said Gradman.

"Suppose those Labour fellows come in, or worse! It's these people with

fixed ideas who are the danger. Look at Ireland!"

"Ah!" said Gradman.

"Suppose I were to make a settlement on her at once with myself as

beneficiary for life, they couldn't take anything but the interest from

me, unless of course they alter the law."

Gradman moved his head and smiled.

"Ah!" he said, "they wouldn't do tha-at!"

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

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

Soames sniffed. Two years! He was only sixty-five!

"That's not the point. Draw a form of settlement that passes all my

property to Miss Fleur's children in equal shares, with antecedent

life-interests first to myself and then to her without power of

anticipation, and add a clause that in the event of anything happening

to divert her life-interest, that interest passes to the trustees, to

apply for her benefit, in their absolute discretion."

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

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

Gradman wrote on a piece of paper: "Life-interest--anticipation--divert

interest--absolute discretion...." and said:

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

fellow."

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

who appeals to me."

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

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

A smile oozed out on Gradman's face, greasy from countless mutton-chops,

the smile of a man who sits all day.

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

"Why? What is he? Forty?"

"Ye-es, quite a young fellow."

"Well, put him in; but I want somebody who'll take a personal interest.

There's no one that I can see."

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

"Val Dartie? With that father?"

"We-ell," murmured Gradman, "he's been dead seven years--the Statute

runs against him."

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

suddenly:

"If they were makin' a levy on capital, they could come on the trustees,

sir. So there you'd be just the same. I'd think it over, if I were you."

"That's true," said Soames. "I will. What have you done about that

dilapidation notice in Vere Street?"

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

at her age."

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

"Still, I'm lookin' at things broadly, sir. She's eighty-one."

"Better serve it," said Soames, "and see what she says. Oh! and Mr.

Timothy? Is everything in order in case of--"

"I've got the inventory of his estate all ready; had the furniture and

pictures valued so that we know what reserves to put on. I shall be

sorry when he goes, though. Dear me! It is a time since I first saw Mr.

Timothy!"

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

"Nao," said Gradman; "but it'll be a pity--the last of the old family!

Shall I take up the matter of that nuisance in Old Compton Street? Those

organs--they're nahsty things."

"Do. I must call for Miss Fleur and catch the four o'clock. Good-day,

Gradman."

"Good-day, Mr. Soames. I hope Miss Fleur--"

"Well enough, but gads about too much."

"Ye-es," grated Gradman; "she's young."

Soames went out, musing: "Old Gradman! If he were younger I'd put him in

the trust. There's nobody I can depend on to take a real interest."

Leaving the bilious and mathematical exactitude, the preposterous peace

of that backwater, he thought suddenly: 'During coverture! Why can't

they exclude fellows like Profond, instead of a lot of hard-working

Germans?' and was surprised at the depth of uneasiness which could

provoke so unpatriotic a thought. But there it was! One never got

a moment of real peace. There was always something at the back of

everything! And he made his way toward Green Street.

Two hours later by his watch, Thomas Gradman, stirring in his swivel

chair, closed the last drawer of his bureau, and putting into

his waistcoat pocket a bunch of keys so fat that they gave him a

protuberance on the liver side, brushed his old top hat round with his

sleeve, took his umbrella, and descended. Thick, short, and buttoned

closely into his old frock coat, he walked toward Covent Garden market.

He never missed that daily promenade to the Tube for Highgate,

and seldom some critical transaction on the way in connection with

vegetables and fruit. Generations might be born, and hats might change,

wars be fought, and Forsytes fade away, but Thomas Gradman, faithful and

grey, would take his daily walk and buy his daily vegetable. Times were

not what they were, and his son had lost a leg, and they never gave him

those nice little plaited baskets to carry the stuff in now, and these

Tubes were convenient things--still he mustn't complain; his health was

good considering his time of life, and after fifty-four years in the

Law he was getting a round eight hundred a year and a little worried

of late, because it was mostly collector's commission on the rents, and

with all this conversion of Forsyte property going on, it looked like

drying up, and the price of living still so high; but it was no good

worrying--"The good God made us all"--as he was in the habit of saying;

still, house property in London--he didn't know what Mr. Roger or Mr.

James would say if they could see it being sold like this--seemed to

show a lack of faith; but Mr. Soames--he worried. Life and lives in

being and twenty-one years after--beyond that you couldn't go; still,

he kept his health wonderfully--and Miss Fleur was a pretty little

thing--she was; she'd marry; but lots of people had no children

nowadays--he had had his first child at twenty-two; and Mr. Jolyon,

married while he was at Cambridge, had his child the same year--gracious

Peter! That was back in '69, a long time before old Mr. Jolyon--fine

judge of property--had taken his Will away from Mr. James--dear, yes!

Those were the days when they were buyin' property right and left, and

none of this khaki and fallin' over one another to get out of things;

and cucumbers at twopence; and a melon--the old melons, that made your

mouth water! Fifty years since he went into Mr. James' office, and Mr.

James had said to him: "Now, Gradman, you're only a shaver--you pay

attention, and you'll make your five hundred a year before you've

done." And he had, and feared God, and served the Forsytes, and kept a

vegetable diet at night. And, buying a copy of John Bull--not that he

approved of it, an extravagant affair--he entered the Tube elevator with

his mere brown-paper parcel, and was borne down into the bowels of the

earth.

VI.--SOAMES' PRIVATE LIFE

On his way to Green Street it occurred to Soames that he ought to go

into Dumetrius' in Suffolk Street about the possibility of the Bolderby

Old Crome. Almost worth while to have fought the war to have the

Bolderby Old Crome, as it were, in flux! Old Bolderby had died, his son

and grandson had been killed--a cousin was coming into the estate, who

meant to sell it, some said because of the condition of England, others

said because he had asthma.

If Dumetrius once got hold of it the price would become prohibitive;

it was necessary for Soames to find out whether Dumetrius had got it,

before he tried to get it himself. He therefore confined himself to

discussing with Dumetrius whether Monticellis would come again now that

it was the fashion for a picture to be anything except a picture; and

the future of Johns, with a side-slip into Buxton Knights. It was only

when leaving that he added: "So they're not selling the Bolderby Old

Crome, after all?" In sheer pride of racial superiority, as he had

calculated would be the case, Dumetrius replied:

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

The flutter of his eyelid fortified Soames in a resolution to write

direct to the new Bolderby, suggesting that the only dignified way

of dealing with an Old Crome was to avoid dealers. He therefore said,

"Well, good-day!" and went, leaving Dumetrius the wiser.

At Green Street he found that Fleur was out and would be all the

evening; she was staying one more night in London. He cabbed on

dejectedly, and caught his train.

He reached his house about six o'clock. The air was heavy, midges

biting, thunder about. Taking his letters he went up to his

dressing-room to cleanse himself of London.

An uninteresting post. A receipt, a bill for purchases on behalf of

Fleur. A circular about an exhibition of etchings. A letter beginning:

"SIR,

"I feel it my duty..."

That would be an appeal or something unpleasant. He looked at once for

the signature. There was none! Incredulously he turned the page over and

examined each corner. Not being a public man, Soames had never yet

had an anonymous letter, and his first impulse was to tear it up, as a

dangerous thing; his second to read it, as a thing still more dangerous.

"SIR,

"I feel it my duty to inform you that having no interest in the

matter your lady is carrying on with a foreigner--"

Reaching that word Soames stopped mechanically and examined the

postmark. So far as he could pierce the impenetrable disguise in which

the Post Office had wrapped it, there was something with a "sea" at the

end and a "t" in it. Chelsea? No! Battersea? Perhaps! He read on.

"These foreigners are all the same. Sack the lot. This one meets

your lady twice a week. I know it of my own knowledge--and to see an

Englishman put on goes against the grain. You watch it and see if what I

say isn't true. I shouldn't meddle if it wasn't a dirty foreigner that's

in it.

"Yours obedient."

The sensation with which Soames dropped the letter was similar to

that he would have had entering his bedroom and finding it full of

black-beetles. The meanness of anonymity gave a shuddering obscenity

to the moment. And the worst of it was that this shadow had been at the

back of his mind ever since the Sunday evening when Fleur had pointed

down at Prosper Profond strolling on the lawn, and said: "Prowling cat!"

Had he not in connection therewith, this very day, perused his Will and

Marriage Settlement? And now this anonymous ruffian, with nothing to

gain, apparently, save the venting of his spite against foreigners, had

wrenched it out of the obscurity in which he had hoped and wished it

would remain. To have such knowledge forced on him, at his time of life,

about Fleur's mother! He picked the letter up from the carpet, tore it

across, and then, when it hung together by just the fold at the back,

stopped tearing, and reread it. He was taking at that moment one of the

decisive resolutions of his life. He would not be forced into another

scandal. No! However he decided to deal with this matter--and it

required the most far-sighted and careful consideration he would

do nothing that might injure Fleur. That resolution taken, his mind

answered the helm again, and he made his ablutions. His hands trembled

as he dried them. Scandal he would not have, but something must be

done to stop this sort of thing! He went into his wife's room and stood

looking around him. The idea of searching for anything which would

incriminate, and entitle him to hold a menace over her, did not even

come to him. There would be nothing--she was much too practical. The

idea of having her watched had been dismissed before it came--too well

he remembered his previous experience of that. No! He had nothing

but this torn-up letter from some anonymous ruffian, whose impudent

intrusion into his private life he so violently resented. It was

repugnant to him to make use of it, but he might have to. What a mercy

Fleur was not at home to-night! A tap on the door broke up his painful

cogitations.

"Mr. Michael Mont, sir, is in the drawing-room. Will you see him?"

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

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

Michael Mont in flannels stood on the verandah smoking a cigarette. He

threw it away as Soames came up, and ran his hand through his hair.

Soames' feeling toward this young man was singular. He was no doubt

a rackety, irresponsible young fellow according to old standards, yet

somehow likeable, with his extraordinarily cheerful way of blurting out

his opinions.

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

Mont came in.

"I thought Fleur would have been back, sir; but I'm glad she isn't. The

fact is, I--I'm fearfully gone on her; so fearfully gone that I thought

you'd better know. It's old-fashioned, of course, coming to fathers

first, but I thought you'd forgive that. I went to my own Dad, and he

says if I settle down he'll see me through. He rather cottons to the

idea, in fact. I told him about your Goya."

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

"Yes, sir; do you?"

Soames smiled faintly.

"You see," resumed Mont, twiddling his straw hat, while his hair, ears,

eyebrows, all seemed to stand up from excitement, "when you've been

through the War you can't help being in a hurry."

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

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

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

"Fleur's too young," he said.

"Oh! no, sir. We're awfully old nowadays. My Dad seems to me a perfect

babe; his thinking apparatus hasn't turned a hair. But he's a Baronight,

of course; that keeps him back."

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

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

know."

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

Young Mont said imploringly: "Oh! no, sir. I simply must hang around, or

I shouldn't have a dog's chance. You'll let Fleur do what she likes, I

suppose, anyway. Madame passes me."

"Indeed!" said Soames frigidly.

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

that Soames smiled.

"You may think you're very old," he said; "but you strike me as

extremely young. To rattle ahead of everything is not a proof of

maturity."

"All right, sir; I give you our age. But to show you I mean

business--I've got a job."

"Glad to hear it."

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

Soames put his hand over his mouth--he had so very nearly said: "God

help the publisher!" His grey eyes scrutinised the agitated young man.

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

Everything--do you understand?"

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

"That's as may be. I'm glad you've told me, however. And now I think

there's nothing more to be said."

"I know it rests with her, sir."

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

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

"No," said Soames, "my experience of life has not made me anxious to

couple people in a hurry. Good-night, Mr. Mont. I shan't tell Fleur what

you've said."

"Oh!" murmured Mont blankly; "I really could knock my brains out for

want of her. She knows that perfectly well."

"I dare say." And Soames held out his hand. A distracted squeeze, a

heavy sigh, and soon after sounds from the young man's motor-cycle

called up visions of flying dust and broken bones.

'The younger generation!' he thought heavily, and went out on to the

lawn. The gardeners had been mowing, and there was still the smell of

fresh-cut grass--the thundery air kept all scents close to earth. The

sky was of a purplish hue--the poplars black. Two or three boats passed

on the river, scuttling, as it were, for shelter before the storm.

'Three days' fine weather,' thought Soames, 'and then a storm!' Where

was Annette? With that chap, for all he knew--she was a young woman!

Impressed with the queer charity of that thought, he entered the

summerhouse and sat down. The fact was--and he admitted it--Fleur was

so much to him that his wife was very little--very little; French--had

never been much more than a mistress, and he was getting indifferent to

that side of things! It was odd how, with all this ingrained care for

moderation and secure investment, Soames ever put his emotional eggs

into one basket. First Irene--now Fleur. He was dimly conscious of it,

sitting there, conscious of its odd dangerousness. It had brought him

to wreck and scandal once, but now--now it should save him! He cared so

much for Fleur that he would have no further scandal. If only he could

get at that anonymous letter-writer, he would teach him not to meddle

and stir up mud at the bottom of water which he wished should remain

stagnant!... A distant flash, a low rumble, and large drops of rain

spattered on the thatch above him. He remained indifferent, tracing a

pattern with his finger on the dusty surface of a little rustic table.

Fleur's future! 'I want fair sailing for her,' he thought. 'Nothing else

matters at my time of life.' A lonely business--life! What you had you

never could keep to yourself! As you warned one off, you let another in.

One could make sure of nothing! He reached up and pulled a red

rambler rose from a cluster which blocked the window. Flowers grew and

dropped--Nature was a queer thing! The thunder rumbled and crashed,

travelling east along a river, the paling flashes flicked his eyes;

the poplar tops showed sharp and dense against the sky, a heavy shower

rustled and rattled and veiled in the little house wherein he sat,

indifferent, thinking.

When the storm was over, he left his retreat and went down the wet path

to the river bank.

Two swans had come, sheltering in among the reeds. He knew the birds

well, and stood watching the dignity in the curve of those white necks

and formidable snake-like heads. 'Not dignified--what I have to do!' he

thought. And yet it must be tackled, lest worse befell. Annette must be

back by now from wherever she had gone, for it was nearly dinner-time,

and as the moment for seeing her approached, the difficulty of knowing

what to say and how to say it had increased. A new and scaring thought

occurred to him. Suppose she wanted her liberty to marry this fellow!

Well, if she did, she couldn't have it. He had not married her for that.

The image of Prosper Profond dawdled before him reassuringly. Not a

marrying man! No, no! Anger replaced that momentary scare. 'He had

better not come my way,' he thought. The mongrel represented---! But

what did Prosper Profond represent? Nothing that mattered surely. And

yet something real enough in the world--unmorality let off its chain,

disillusionment on the prowl! That expression Annette had caught

from him: "Je m'en fiche!" A fatalistic chap! A continental--a

cosmopolitan--a product of the age! If there were condemnation more

complete, Soames felt that he did not know it.

The swans had turned their heads, and were looking past him into some

distance of their own. One of them uttered a little hiss, wagged its

tail, turned as if answering to a rudder, and swam away. The other

followed. Their white bodies, their stately necks, passed out of his

sight, and he went toward the house.

Annette was in the drawing-room, dressed for dinner, and he thought as

he went up-stairs 'Handsome is as handsome does.' Handsome! Except for

remarks about the curtains in the drawing-room, and the storm, there was

practically no conversation during a meal distinguished by exactitude

of quantity and perfection of quality. Soames drank nothing. He followed

her into the drawing-room afterward, and found her smoking a cigarette

on the sofa between the two French windows. She was leaning back, almost

upright, in a low black frock, with her knees crossed and her blue eyes

half-closed; grey-blue smoke issued from her red, rather full lips, a

fillet bound her chestnut hair, she wore the thinnest silk stockings,

and shoes with very high heels showing off her instep. A fine piece in

any room! Soames, who held that torn letter in a hand thrust deep into

the side-pocket of his dinner-jacket, said:

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

He did so, and stood looking at a David Cox adorning the cream-panelled

wall close by.

What was she thinking of? He had never understood a woman in his

life--except Fleur--and Fleur not always! His heart beat fast. But if he

meant to do it, now was the moment. Turning from the David Cox, he took

out the torn letter.

"I've had this."

Her eyes widened, stared at him, and hardened.

Soames handed her the letter.

"It's torn, but you can read it." And he turned back to the David Cox--a

sea-piece, of good tone--but without movement enough. 'I wonder what

that chap's doing at this moment?' he thought. 'I'll astonish him yet.'

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Annette holding the letter rigidly;

her eyes moved from side to side under her darkened lashes and frowning

darkened eyes. She dropped the letter, gave a little shiver, smiled, and

said:

"Dirrty!"

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

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

She was brazen!

"Is that all you have to say?"

"No."

"Well, speak out!"

"What is the good of talking?"

Soames said icily: "So you admit it?"

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

It is dangerous."

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

"Do you remember," he said, halting in front of her, "what you were when

I married you? Working at accounts in a restaurant."

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

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

David Cox.

"I am not going to bandy words. I require you to give up

this--friendship. I think of the matter entirely as it affects Fleur."

"Ah!--Fleur!"

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

mine."

"It is kind to admit that!"

"Are you going to do what I say?"

"I refuse to tell you."

"Then I must make you."

Annette smiled.

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

will regret."

Anger swelled the veins on his forehead. He opened his mouth to vent

that emotion, and could not. Annette went on:

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

Soames writhed. He had a sense of being treated like a child by this

woman who had deserved he did not know what.

"When two people have married, and lived like us, Soames, they had

better be quiet about each other. There are things one does not drag up

into the light for people to laugh at. You will be quiet, then; not for

my sake for your own. You are getting old; I am not, yet. You have made

me ver-ry practical"

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

repeated dully:

"I require you to give up this friendship."

"And if I do not?"

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

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

"You will live a long time, Soames."

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

Annette shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not think so. Living with you has killed things in me, it is true;

but I am not a bad woman. I am sensible--that is all. And so will you be

when you have thought it over."

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

"Mon cher, you are funny. You do not want me, you have as much of me as

you want; and you wish the rest of me to be dead. I admit nothing, but I

am not going to be dead, Soames, at my age; so you had better be quiet,

I tell you. I myself will make no scandal; none. Now, I am not saying

any more, whatever you do."

She reached out, took a French novel off a little table, and opened it.

Soames watched her, silenced by the tumult of his feelings. The thought

of that man was almost making him want her, and this was a revelation

of their relationship, startling to one little given to introspective

philosophy. Without saying another word he went out and up to the

picture-gallery. This came of marrying a Frenchwoman! And yet, without

her there would have been no Fleur! She had served her purpose.

'She's right,' he thought; 'I can do nothing. I don't even know that

there's anything in it.' The instinct of self-preservation warned him

to batten down his hatches, to smother the fire with want of air. Unless

one believed there was something in a thing, there wasn't.

That night he went into her room. She received him in the most

matter-of-fact way, as if there had been no scene between them. And he

returned to his own room with a curious sense of peace. If one didn't

choose to see, one needn't. And he did not choose--in future he did

not choose. There was nothing to be gained by it--nothing! Opening the

drawer he took from the sachet a handkerchief, and the framed photograph

of Fleur. When he had looked at it a little he slipped it down, and

there was that other one--that old one of Irene. An owl hooted while he

stood in his window gazing at it. The owl hooted, the red climbing roses

seemed to deepen in colour, there came a scent of lime-blossom. God!

That had been a different thing! Passion--Memory! Dust!

VII.--JUNE TAKES A HAND

One who was a sculptor, a Slav, a sometime resident in New York, an

egoist, and impecunious, was to be found of an evening in June Forsyte's

studio on the bank of the Thames at Chiswick. On the evening of July 6,

Boris Strumolowski--several of whose works were on show there because

they were as yet too advanced to be on show anywhere else--had begun

well, with that aloof and rather Christ-like silence which admirably

suited his youthful, round, broad cheek-boned countenance framed in

bright hair banged like a girl's. June had known him three weeks, and he

still seemed to her the principal embodiment of genius, and hope of

the future; a sort of Star of the East which had strayed into an

unappreciative West. Until that evening he had conversationally confined

himself to recording his impressions of the United States, whose dust

he had just shaken from off his feet--a country, in his opinion, so

barbarous in every way that he had sold practically nothing there, and

become an object of suspicion to the police; a country, as he said,

without a race of its own, without liberty, equality, or fraternity,

without principles, traditions, taste, without--in a word--a soul. He

had left it for his own good, and come to the only other country where

he could live well. June had dwelt unhappily on him in her lonely

moments, standing before his creations--frightening, but powerful and

symbolic once they had been explained! That he, haloed by bright hair

like an early Italian painting, and absorbed in his genius to the

exclusion of all else--the only sign of course by which real genius

could be told--should still be a "lame duck" agitated her warm heart

almost to the exclusion of Paul Post. And she had begun to take steps to

clear her Gallery, in order to fill it with Strumolowski masterpieces.

She had at once encountered trouble. Paul Post had kicked; Vospovitch

had stung. With all the emphasis of a genius which she did not as yet

deny them, they had demanded another six weeks at least of her Gallery.

The American stream, still flowing in, would soon be flowing out. The

American stream was their right, their only hope, their salvation--since

nobody in this "beastly" country cared for Art. June had yielded to

the demonstration. After all Boris would not mind their having the full

benefit of an American stream, which he himself so violently despised.

This evening she had put that to Boris with nobody else present, except

Hannah Hobdey, the mediaeval black-and-whitist, and Jimmy Portugal,

editor of the Neo-Artist. She had put it to him with that sudden

confidence which continual contact with the neo-artistic world had never

been able to dry up in her warm and generous nature. He had not broken

his Christ-like silence, however, for more than two minutes before she

began to move her blue eyes from side to side, as a cat moves its tail.

This--he said--was characteristic of England, the most selfish country

in the world; the country which sucked the blood of other countries;

destroyed the brains and hearts of Irishmen, Hindus, Egyptians, Boers,

and Burmese, all the best races in the world; bullying, hypocritical

England! This was what he had expected, coming to, such a country, where

the climate was all fog, and the people all tradesmen perfectly blind

to Art, and sunk in profiteering and the grossest materialism. Conscious

that Hannah Hobdey was murmuring, "Hear, hear!" and Jimmy Portugal

sniggering, June grew crimson, and suddenly rapped out:

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

The remark was so singularly at variance with all she had led him to

expect from her, that Strumolowski stretched out his hand and took a

cigarette.

"England never wants an idealist," he said.

But in June something primitively English was thoroughly upset; old

Jolyon's sense of justice had risen, as it were, from bed. "You come and

sponge on us," she said, "and then abuse us. If you think that's playing

the game, I don't."

She now discovered that which others had discovered before her--the

thickness of hide beneath which the sensibility of genius is sometimes

veiled. Strumolowski's young and ingenuous face became the incarnation

of a sneer.

"Sponge, one does not sponge, one takes what is owing--a tenth part of

what is owing. You will repent to say that, Miss Forsyte."

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

"Ah! We know very well, we artists--you take us to get what you can

out of us. I want nothing from you"--and he blew out a cloud of June's

smoke.

Decision rose in an icy puff from the turmoil of insulted shame within

her. "Very well, then, you can take your things away."

And, almost in the same moment, she thought: 'Poor boy! He's only got

a garret, and probably not a taxi fare. In front of these people, too;

it's positively disgusting!'

Young Strumolowski shook his head violently; his hair, thick, smooth,

close as a golden plate, did not fall off.

"I can live on nothing," he said shrilly; "I have often had to for the

sake of my Art. It is you bourgeois who force us to spend money."

The words hit June like a pebble, in the ribs. After all she had done

for Art, all her identification with its troubles and lame ducks. She

was struggling for adequate words when the door was opened, and her

Austrian murmured:

"A young lady, gnadiges Fraulein."

"Where?"

"In the little meal-room."

With a glance at Boris Strumolowski, at Hannah Hobdey, at Jimmy

Portugal, June said nothing, and went out, devoid of equanimity.

Entering the "little meal-room," she perceived the young lady to be

Fleur--looking very pretty, if pale. At this disenchanted moment a

little lame duck of her own breed was welcome to June, so homoeopathic

by instinct.

The girl must have come, of course, because of Jon; or, if not, at least

to get something out of her. And June felt just then that to assist

somebody was the only bearable thing.

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

"Yes. What a jolly little duck of a house! But please don't let me

bother you, if you've got people."

"Not at all," said June. "I want to let them stew in their own juice for

a bit. Have you come about Jon?"

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

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

They were standing one on each side of the little bare table at which

June took her meals. A vase on it was full of Iceland poppies; the

girl raised her hand and touched them with a gloved finger. To her

new-fangled dress, frilly about the hips and tight below the knees, June

took a sudden liking--a charming colour, flax-blue.

'She makes a picture,' thought June. Her little room, with its

whitewashed walls, its floor and hearth of old pink brick, its black

paint, and latticed window athwart which the last of the sunlight was

shining, had never looked so charming, set off by this young figure,

with the creamy, slightly frowning face. She remembered with sudden

vividness how nice she herself had looked in those old days when her

heart was set on Philip Bosinney, that dead lover, who had broken from

her to destroy for ever Irene's allegiance to this girl's father. Did

Fleur know of that, too?

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

It was some seconds before Fleur answered.

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

it."

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

"What else is there to do?"

The girl seemed to June, suddenly, intolerably spiritless.

"I suppose you're right," she muttered. "I know my father thinks so;

but--I should never have done it myself. I can't take things lying

down."

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

sounded!

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

"Well, aren't you?"

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. 'I might have known it,' thought June;

'she's Soames' daughter--fish! And yet--he!'

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

"Could I see Jon here to-morrow on his way down to Holly's? He'd come if

you sent him a line to-night. And perhaps afterward you'd let them know

quietly at Robin Hill that it's all over, and that they needn't tell Jon

about his mother."

"All right!" said June abruptly. "I'll write now, and you can post it.

Half-past two tomorrow. I shan't be in, myself."

She sat down at the tiny bureau which filled one corner. When she looked

round with the finished note Fleur was still touching the poppies with

her gloved finger.

June licked a stamp. "Well, here it is. If you're not in love, of

course, there's no more to be said. Jon's lucky."

Fleur took the note. "Thanks awfully!"

'Cold-blooded little baggage!' thought June. Jon, son of her father,

to love, and not to be loved by the daughter of--Soames! It was

humiliating!

"Is that all?"

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

door.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!... Little piece of fashion!" muttered June, closing the

door. "That family!" And she marched back toward her studio. Boris

Strumolowski had regained his Christ-like silence and Jimmy Portugal

was damning everybody, except the group in whose behalf he ran the

Neo-Artist. Among the condemned were Eric Cobbley, and several other

"lame-duck" genii who at one time or another had held first place in

the repertoire of June's aid and adoration. She experienced a sense of

futility and disgust, and went to the window to let the river-wind blow

those squeaky words away.

But when at length Jimmy Portugal had finished, and gone with Hannah

Hobdey, she sat down and mothered young Strumolowski for half an hour,

promising him a month, at least, of the American stream; so that he went

away with his halo in perfect order. 'In spite of all,' June thought,

'Boris is wonderful.'

VIII.--THE BIT BETWEEN THE TEETH

To know that your hand is against every one's is--for some natures--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 eyes of the Iseeum 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 hat--a 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?

"Good-night, Miss Forsyde! Remember me to Mrs. Dartie. I'm not so bad

really. Good-night!" Fleur left him standing there with his hat raised.

Stealing a look round, she saw him stroll--immaculate and heavy--back

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 twenty-one; 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

twenty-one 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 flower-beds, labelled trees, and broad green spaces,

and having lunched off anchovy-paste sandwiches and coffee, returned to

Chiswick and rang June's bell. The Austrian admitted her to the "little

meal-room." 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 rush-seated 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 point-blank 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 everything--weakened 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:

"No-no, 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 heart--like 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 brick-kilns 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.

IX.--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?"

"He--he's a product--like all these young people."

"What were you at his age, dear?"

Soames smiled grimly.

"We went to work, and didn't play about--flying 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 hot-water 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 hot-water pipe. The hapless movement touched her,

who had no fear of her father--none.

"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's--it's--perverse!"

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 pipe-joint, and

then said suddenly:

"I must think this over--I'll speak to you again to-night."

She knew this was final for the moment, and stole away, leaving him

still looking at the pipe-joint. She wandered into the fruit-garden,

among the raspberry and currant bushes, without impetus to pick and eat.

Two months ago--she was light-hearted! Even two days ago--light-hearted,

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

hold-fast 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 self-possessed, 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 cherry-tree. A breeze

sighed in the higher boughs; the sky seen through their green was very

blue and very white in cloud--those 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

fruit-trees planted by her father five-and-twenty, years ago. Birds were

almost silent, the cuckoos had ceased to sing, but wood-pigeons 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 he--when

young--had 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 ox-eyed 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 disease--sentiment 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 lamp-shade, 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 black--her 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

half-mourning 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; but--but you're everything. Your

mother--" he paused, staring at his finger-bowl of Venetian glass.

"Yes?"'

"I've only you to look to. I've never had--never 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. They--they hate me,

as people always hate those whom they have injured." "But he--Jon--"

"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 months--two

months--against the feelings of thirty-five years! What chance do you

think you have? Two months--your very first love affair, a matter of

half a dozen meetings, a few walks and talks, a few kisses--against,

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. Good-night!" 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.

"Jolly-jolly!" 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 drawing-room 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!'

X.--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 cup--it 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:

"Well--thank 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 sugar--she 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 man--the 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 mother--she nice and well?"

"Yes, very."

"He have her photograph on his dressing-table. 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. May--may I leave this with you?"

He put a ten-shilling 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 chalk-pit 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

dinner-bell 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, to-day'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

week-end. 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. She--she--" 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. Everybody--everybody 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 night-Jar's harsh purring. He leaned far out. Cold

moon--warm 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 night-jar 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--indecision.

XI.--TIMOTHY PROPHESIES

On the day of the cancelled meeting at the National Gallery began the

second anniversary of the resurrection of England's pride and glory--or,

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 squash-hatted, 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. E-ton! E-ton! Har-r-o-o-o-w!

Among the many Forsytes, present on a hunting-ground 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 nines 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 colourless-no 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 disdainful--not 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 "mid-off." He

cited all the "great mid-offs" 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

pigeon-pie, 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--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

were--there'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

streets--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--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 motor-cars; the War has finished it."

"I wonder what's coming?" said Winifred in a voice dreamy from

pigeon-pie. "I'm not at all sure we shan't go back to crinolines and

pegtops. 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 youngsters--it's all a short life and a merry one with them."

"There's a hat!" said Winifred. "I don't know--when you come to think

of the people killed and all that in the War, it's rather wonderful, I

think. There's no other country--Prosper 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, grey-bearded, 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

change--except 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 old-fashioned. 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 counter-cheers. 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 ever-welcome 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 self-control; 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 pettish--and 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 hat-rack, 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. Good-bye, sir; it has been a pleasure."

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

And, shaking her crumpled hand, he went down-stairs. 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, good-bye!" said Soames, and got into his taxi.

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

Reaching the hotel at Knightsbridge he went to their sitting-room,

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

bull-dogged 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 face--pale, 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. She--she was

"holding on"!

PART III

I.--OLD JOLYON WALKS

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!

Fifty-eight 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 eighteen-twenties had been passed without

polish in the game of cricket. Old Jolyon would speak quite openly of

swipes, full tosses, half and three-quarter 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 bowling 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

go--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

corn-flowers--by old Jolyon's whim his grandson had been canonised at

a trifle less expense--again Jolyon had experienced the heat and

counter-passions 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 heart-breaking 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 Sonata--so 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, black-coated, 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 funked

it--funked hurting her and Jon and myself. I've got a heart; I've funked

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

lamp-light 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--no, 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, beauty-loving 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 to-day. 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

fifty-seven. 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, re-reading. 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 green-fly 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 she--to 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 to-morrow."

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 Paris--his last and most enduring romance. But the French--no

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 seventy-two. 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 case--Youth, unfortunately,

cures itself. You talk lightly about 'old things like that,' knowing

nothing--as you say truly--of 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 aroused--the 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 buried--it

can't indeed."

Jon got off the arm of the chair.

'The girl'--thought Jolyon--'there she goes--starting up before

him--life itself--eager, pretty, loving!'

"I can't, Father; how can I--just 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 to-day, 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 blue-bottle 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 her--to

Soames--to those two children--to 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 blue-bottle 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

tender-hearted 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 farm-buildings he called again, and looked into the dark

cow-house. 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 moon-white

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

honey-suckle 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

long--very 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 music-room 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 read--he knew it so well, though he had never had a letter from him

one quarter so long. He read with a dull feeling--imagination 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 disgusting--dead 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

mother--and 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 him--red,

stock-fish 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

aversion-alive in her to-day.... 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, and--now--I've--got

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 floor--as

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 dressing-table. 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 window-grey

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 dining-room 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! Jon--he's dead--he'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

could--how could Dad be dead, when only an hour ago--! His mother's arms

were round the knees; pressing her breast against them. "Why--why

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 cry--Mother!"

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 angry--always whimsical, and kind. "To be kind and keep your end

up--there'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

suddenly--known, and not said a word. He gazed with an awed and

passionate reverence. The loneliness of it--just 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 face--not 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

reached--the 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 this--surely 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's--his

half-brother, 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

in--everything 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

quick-blooded 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--he thought--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 water-colour 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,

ye-es--just my age, and gone--dear, dear! I dare say she feels it. She

was a nice-lookin' 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--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 idle--so 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's--very 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 sang-froid.

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 re-establish 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 title--land! 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! Good-bye, 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 billiard-table. 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

to-day."

"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! darling--when 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--ah! 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 meadow-sweet, 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

vivisecting 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

ego-mania--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 billiard-room, 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, sigh--do 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 shoulders--the 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 self-interest 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 to-morrow."

"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 crest--a 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 ceremonies--the

reading of the Will, valuation of the estate, distribution of the

legacies--were 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 twenty-one, 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 self-assertion, 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 long-faded 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 paint-stained 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 plash 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 paint-stained 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 up-stairs, 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 window-seat and roamed in the big

grey ghostly room, whose walls were hung with silvered canvas. This

house his father said in that death-bed letter--had been built for

his mother to live in--with Fleur's father! He put out his hand in the

half-dark, 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--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 past--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! Milksop tied to his

mother's...! His cheeks burned. He shut the window, drew curtains over

it, switched off the lighted sconce, and went up-stairs.

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 window-seat, 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 somewhere--as 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 to-day. 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 held-up feeling within him.

VII.--EMBASSY

Enquiring for her at tea time Soames learned that Fleur had been out in

the car since two. Three hours! Where had she gone? Up to London without

a word to him? He had never become quite reconciled with cars. He had

embraced them in principle--like the born empiricist, or Forsyte, that

he was--adopting each symptom of progress as it came along with: "Well,

we couldn't do without them now." But in fact he found them tearing,

great, smelly things. Obliged by Annette to have one--a Rollhard with

pearl-grey cushions, electric light, little mirrors, trays for the ashes

of cigarettes, flower vases--all smelling of petrol and stephanotis--he

regarded it much as he used to regard his brother-in-law, Montague

Dartie. The thing typified all that was fast, insecure, and

subcutaneously oily in modern life. As modern life became faster,

looser, younger, Soames was becoming older, slower, tighter, more and

more in thought and language like his father James before him. He was

almost aware of it himself. Pace and progress pleased him less and

less; there was an ostentation, too, about a car which he considered

provocative in the prevailing mood of Labour. On one occasion that

fellow Sims had driven over the only vested interest of a working man.

Soames had not forgotten the behaviour of its master, when not many

people would have stopped to put up with it. He had been sorry for

the dog, and quite prepared to take its part against the car, if that

ruffian hadn't been so outrageous. With four hours fast becoming five,

and still no Fleur, all the old car-wise feelings he had experienced in

person and by proxy balled within him, and sinking sensations troubled

the pit of his stomach. At seven he telephoned to Winifred by trunk

call. No! Fleur had not been to Green Street. Then where was she?

Visions of his beloved daughter rolled up in her pretty frills, all

blood and dust-stained, in some hideous catastrophe, began to haunt

him. He went to her room and spied among her things. She had taken

nothing--no dressing-case, no Jewellery. And this, a relief in one

sense, increased his fears of an accident. Terrible to be helpless when

his loved one was missing, especially when he couldn't bear fuss

or publicity of any kind! What should he do if she were not back by

nightfall?

At a quarter to eight he heard the car. A great weight lifted from off

his heart; he hurried down. She was getting out--pale and tired-looking,

but nothing wrong. He met her in the hall.

"You've frightened me. Where have you been?"

"To Robin Hill. I'm sorry, dear. I had to go; I'll tell you afterward."

And, with a flying kiss, she ran up-stairs.

Soames waited in the drawing-room. To Robin Hill! What did that portend?

It was not a subject they could discuss at dinner--consecrated to the

susceptibilities of the butler. The agony of nerves Soames had been

through, the relief he felt at her safety, softened his power to condemn

what she had done, or resist what she was going to do; he waited in a

relaxed stupor for her revelation. Life was a queer business. There he

was at sixty-five and no more in command of things than if he had not

spent forty years in building up security-always something one couldn't

get on terms with! In the pocket of his dinner-jacket was a letter from

Annette. She was coming back in a fortnight. He knew nothing of what she

had been doing out there. And he was glad that he did not. Her absence

had been a relief. Out of sight was out of mind! And now she was coming

back. Another worry! And the Bolderby Old Crome was gone--Dumetrius

had got it--all because that anonymous letter had put it out of his

thoughts. He furtively remarked the strained look on his daughter's

face, as if she too were gazing at a picture that she couldn't buy.

He almost wished the War back. Worries didn't seem, then, quite so

worrying. From the caress in her voice, the look on her face, he became

certain that she wanted something from him, uncertain whether it would

be wise of him to give it her. He pushed his savoury away uneaten, and

even joined her in a cigarette.

After dinner she set the electric piano-player going. And he augured the

worst when she sat down on a cushion footstool at his knee, and put her

hand on his.

"Darling, be nice to me. I had to see Jon--he wrote to me. He's going to

try what he can do with his mother. But I've been thinking. It's really

in your hands, Father. If you'd persuade her that it doesn't mean

renewing the past in any way! That I shall stay yours, and Jon will stay

hers; that you need never see him or her, and she need never see you or

me! Only you could persuade her, dear, because only you could promise.

One can't promise for other people. Surely it wouldn't be too awkward

for you to see her just this once now that Jon's father is dead?"

"Too awkward?" Soames repeated. "The whole thing's preposterous."

"You know," said Fleur, without looking up, "you wouldn't mind seeing

her, really."

Soames was silent. Her words had expressed a truth too deep for him to

admit. She slipped her fingers between his own--hot, slim, eager, they

clung there. This child of his would corkscrew her way into a brick

wall!

"What am I to do if you won't, Father?" she said very softly.

"I'll do anything for your happiness," said Soanies; "but this isn't for

your happiness."

"Oh! it is; it is!"

"It'll only stir things up," he said grimly.

"But they are stirred up. The thing is to quiet them. To make her feel

that this is just our lives, and has nothing to do with yours or hers.

You can do it, Father, I know you can."

"You know a great deal, then," was Soames' glum answer.

"If you will, Jon and I will wait a year--two years if you like."

"It seems to me," murmured Soames, "that you care nothing about what I

feel."

Fleur pressed his hand against her cheek.

"I do, darling. But you wouldn't like me to be awfully miserable."

How she wheedled to get her ends! And trying with all his might to think

she really cared for him--he was not sure--not sure. All she cared for

was this boy! Why should he help her to get this boy, who was killing

her affection for himself? Why should he? By the laws of the Forsytes it

was foolish! There was nothing to be had out of it--nothing! To give her

to that boy! To pass her into the enemy's camp, under the influence of

the woman who had injured him so deeply! Slowly--inevitably--he would

lose this flower of his life! And suddenly he was conscious that his

hand was wet. His heart gave a little painful jump. He couldn't bear her

to cry. He put his other hand quickly over hers, and a tear dropped on

that, too. He couldn't go on like this! "Well, well," he said, "I'll

think it over, and do what I can. Come, come!" If she must have it for

her happiness--she must; he couldn't refuse to help her. And lest she

should begin to thank him he got out of his chair and went up to the

piano-player--making that noise! It ran down, as he reached it, with

a faint buzz. That musical box of his nursery days: "The Harmonious

Blacksmith," "Glorious Port"--the thing had always made him miserable

when his mother set it going on Sunday afternoons. Here it was

again--the same thing, only larger, more expensive, and now it played

"The Wild, Wild Women," and "The Policeman's Holiday," and he was no

longer in black velvet with a sky blue collar. 'Profond's right,' he

thought, 'there's nothing in it! We're all progressing to the grave!'

And with that surprising mental comment he walked out.

He did not see Fleur again that night. But, at breakfast, her eyes

followed him about with an appeal he could not escape--not that he

intended to try. No! He had made up his mind to the nerve-racking

business. He would go to Robin Hill--to that house of memories. Pleasant

memory--the last! Of going down to keep that boy's father and Irene

apart by threatening divorce. He had often thought, since, that it had

clinched their union. And, now, he was going to clinch the union of that

boy with his girl. 'I don't know what I've done,' he thought, 'to have

such things thrust on me!' He went up by train and down by train, and

from the station walked by the long rising lane, still very much as he

remembered it over thirty years ago. Funny--so near London! Some one

evidently was holding on to the land there. This speculation soothed

him, moving between the high hedges slowly, so as not to get overheated,

though the day was chill enough. After all was said and done there was

something real about land, it didn't shift. Land, and good pictures! The

values might fluctuate a bit, but on the whole they were always going

up--worth holding on to, in a world where there was such a lot of

unreality, cheap building, changing fashions, such a "Here to-day and

gone to-morrow" spirit. The French were right, perhaps, with their

peasant proprietorship, though he had no opinion of the French. One's

bit of land! Something solid in it! He had heard peasant proprietors

described as a pig-headed lot; had heard young Mont call his father a

pigheaded Morning Poster--disrespectful young devil. Well, there were

worse things than being pig-headed or reading the Morning Post. There

was Profond and his tribe, and all these Labour chaps, and loud-mouthed

politicians and 'wild, wild women'! A lot of worse things! And suddenly

Soames became conscious of feeling weak, and hot, and shaky. Sheer

nerves at the meeting before him! As Aunt Juley might have said--quoting

"Superior Dosset"--his nerves were "in a proper fautigue." He could see

the house now among its trees, the house he had watched being built,

intending it for himself and this woman, who, by such strange fate,

had lived in it with another after all! He began to think of Dumetrius,

Local Loans, and other forms of investment. He could not afford to meet

her with his nerves all shaking; he who represented the Day of Judgment

for her on earth as it was in heaven; he, legal ownership, personified,

meeting lawless beauty, incarnate. His dignity demanded impassivity

during this embassy designed to link their offspring, who, if she had

behaved herself, would have been brother and sister. That wretched tune,

"The Wild, Wild Women," kept running in his head, perversely, for tunes

did not run there as a rule. Passing the poplars in front of the house,

he thought: 'How they've grown; I had them planted!' A maid answered his

ring.

"Will you say--Mr. Forsyte, on a very special matter."

If she realised who he was, quite probably she would not see him. 'By

George!' he thought, hardening as the tug came. 'It's a topsy-turvy

affair!'

The maid came back. "Would the gentleman state his business, please?"

"Say it concerns Mr. Jon," said Soames.

And once more he was alone in that hall with the pool of grey-white

marble designed by her first lover. Ah! she had been a bad lot--had

loved two men, and not himself! He must remember that when he came face

to face with her once more. And suddenly he saw her in the opening chink

between the long heavy purple curtains, swaying, as if in hesitation;

the old perfect poise and line, the old startled dark-eyed gravity, the

old calm defensive voice: "Will you come in, please?"

He passed through that opening. As in the picture-gallery and the

confectioner's shop, she seemed to him still beautiful. And this was the

first time--the very first--since he married her seven-and-thirty years

ago, that he was speaking to her without the legal right to call her

his. She was not wearing black--one of that fellow's radical notions, he

supposed.

"I apologise for coming," he said glumly; "but this business must be

settled one way or the other."

"Won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you."

Anger at his false position, impatience of ceremony between them,

mastered him, and words came tumbling out:

"It's an infernal mischance; I've done my best to discourage it. I

consider my daughter crazy, but I've got into the habit of indulging

her; that's why I'm here. I suppose you're fond of your son."

"Devotedly."

"Well?"

"It rests with him."

He had a sense of being met and baffled. Always--always she had baffled

him, even in those old first married days.

"It's a mad notion," he said.

"It is."

"If you had only--! Well--they might have been--" he did not finish that

sentence "brother and sister and all this saved," but he saw her shudder

as if he had, and stung by the sight he crossed over to the window. Out

there the trees had not grown--they couldn't, they were old!

"So far as I'm concerned," he said, "you may make your mind easy. I

desire to see neither you nor your son if this marriage comes about.

Young people in these days are--are unaccountable. But I can't bear to

see my daughter unhappy. What am I to say to her when I go back?"

"Please say to her as I said to you, that it rests with Jon."

"You don't oppose it?"

"With all my heart; not with my lips."

Soames stood, biting his finger.

"I remember an evening--" he said suddenly; and was silent. What was

there--what was there in this woman that would not fit into the four

corners of his hate or condemnation? "Where is he--your son?"

"Up in his father's studio, I think."

"Perhaps you'd have him down."

He watched her ring the bell, he watched the maid come in.

"Please tell Mr. Jon that I want him."

"If it rests with him," said Soames hurriedly, when the maid was gone,

"I suppose I may take it for granted that this unnatural marriage

will take place; in that case there'll be formalities. Whom do I deal

with--Herring's?"

Irene nodded.

"You don't propose to live with them?"

Irene shook her head.

"What happens to this house?"

"It will be as Jon wishes."

"This house," said Soames suddenly: "I had hopes when I began it.

If they live in it--their children! They say there's such a thing as

Nemesis. Do you believe in it?"

"Yes."

"Oh! You do!"

He had come back from the window, and was standing close to her, who, in

the curve of her grand piano, was, as it were, embayed.

"I'm not likely to see you again," he said slowly. "Will you shake

hands"--his lip quivered, the words came out jerkily--"and let the past

die." He held out his hand. Her pale face grew paler, her eyes so dark,

rested immovably on his, her hands remained clasped in front of her. He

heard a sound and turned. That boy was standing in the opening of the

curtains. Very queer he looked, hardly recognisable as the young fellow

he had seen in the Gallery off Cork Street--very queer; much older, no

youth in the face at all--haggard, rigid, his hair ruffled, his eyes

deep in his head. Soames made an effort, and said with a lift of his

lip, not quite a smile nor quite a sneer:

"Well, young man! I'm here for my daughter; it rests with you, it

seems--this matter. Your mother leaves it in your hands."

The boy continued staring at his mother's face, and made no answer.

"For my daughter's sake I've brought myself to come," said Soames. "What

am I to say to her when I go back?"

Still looking at his mother, the boy said, quietly:

"Tell Fleur that it's no good, please; I must do as my father wished

before he died."

"Jon!"

"It's all right, Mother."

In a kind of stupefaction Soames looked from one to the other; then,

taking up hat and umbrella which he had put down on a chair, he walked

toward the curtains. The boy stood aside for him to go by. He passed

through and heard the grate of the rings as the curtains were drawn

behind him. The sound liberated something in his chest.

'So that's that!' he thought, and passed out of the front door.

VIII.--THE DARK TUNE

As Soames walked away from the house at Robin Hill the sun broke through

the grey of that chill afternoon, in smoky radiance. So absorbed in

landscape painting that he seldom looked seriously for effects of Nature

out of doors--he was struck by that moody effulgence--it mourned with

a triumph suited to his own feeling. Victory in defeat. His embassy

had come to naught. But he was rid of those people, had regained his

daughter at the expense of--her happiness. What would Fleur say to him?

Would she believe he had done his best? And under that sunlight faring

on the elms, hazels, hollies of the lane and those unexploited fields,

Soames felt dread. She would be terribly upset! He must appeal to her

pride. That boy had given her up, declared part and lot with the woman

who so long ago had given her father up! Soames clenched his hands.

Given him up, and why? What had been wrong with him? And once more

he felt the malaise of one who contemplates himself as seen by

another--like a dog who chances on his refection in a mirror and is

intrigued and anxious at the unseizable thing.

Not in a hurry to get home, he dined in town at the Connoisseurs. While

eating a pear it suddenly occurred to him that, if he had not gone down

to Robin Hill, the boy might not have so decided. He remembered the

expression on his face while his mother was refusing the hand he had

held out. A strange, an awkward thought! Had Fleur cooked her own goose

by trying to make too sure?

He reached home at half-past nine. While the car was passing in at one

drive gate he heard the grinding sputter of a motor-cycle passing out

by the other. Young Mont, no doubt, so Fleur had not been lonely. But he

went in with a sinking heart. In the cream-panelled drawing-room she was

sitting with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her clasped hands,

in front of a white camellia plant which filled the fireplace. That

glance at her before she saw him renewed his dread. What was she seeing

among those white camellias?

"Well, Father!"

Soames shook his head. His tongue failed him. This was murderous work!

He saw her eyes dilate, her lips quivering.

"What? What? Quick, Father!"

"My dear," said Soames, "I--I did my best, but--" And again he shook his

head.

Fleur ran to him, and put a hand on each of his shoulders.

"She?"

"No," muttered Soames; "he. I was to tell you that it was no use; he

must do what his father wished before he died." He caught her by the

waist. "Come, child, don't let them hurt you. They're not worth your

little finger."

Fleur tore herself from his grasp.

"You didn't you--couldn't have tried. You--you betrayed me, Father!"

Bitterly wounded, Soames gazed at her passionate figure writhing there

in front of him.

"You didn't try--you didn't--I was a fool! I won't believe he could--he

ever could! Only yesterday he--! Oh! why did I ask you?"

"Yes," said Soames, quietly, "why did you? I swallowed my feelings;

I did my best for you, against my judgment--and this is my reward.

Good-night!"

With every nerve in his body twitching he went toward the door.

Fleur darted after him.

"He gives me up? You mean that? Father!"

Soames turned and forced himself to answer:

"Yes."

"Oh!" cried Fleur. "What did you--what could you have done in those old

days?"

The breathless sense of really monstrous injustice cut the power of

speech in Soames' throat. What had he done! What had they done to him!

And with quite unconscious dignity he put his hand on his breast, and

looked at her.

"It's a shame!" cried Fleur passionately.

Soames went out. He mounted, slow and icy, to his picture gallery, and

paced among his treasures. Outrageous! Oh! Outrageous! She was spoiled!

Ah! and who had spoiled her? He stood still before the Goya copy.

Accustomed to her own way in everything. Flower of his life! And

now that she couldn't have it! He turned to the window for some air.

Daylight was dying, the moon rising, gold behind the poplars! What sound

was that? Why! That piano thing! A dark tune, with a thrum and a throb!

She had set it going--what comfort could she get from that? His eyes

caught movement down there beyond the lawn, under the trellis of rambler

roses and young acacia-trees, where the moonlight fell. There she was,

roaming up and down. His heart gave a little sickening jump. What would

she do under this blow? How could he tell? What did he know of her--he

had only loved her all his life--looked on her as the apple of his eye!

He knew nothing--had no notion. There she was--and that dark tune--and

the river gleaming in the moonlight!

'I must go out,' he thought.

He hastened down to the drawing-room, lighted just as he had left it,

with the piano thrumming out that waltz, or fox-trot, or whatever they

called it in these days, and passed through on to the verandah.

Where could he watch, without her seeing him? And he stole down through

the fruit garden to the boat-house. He was between her and the

river now, and his heart felt lighter. She was his daughter, and

Annette's--she wouldn't do anything foolish; but there it was--he didn't

know! From the boat house window he could see the last acacia and the

spin of her skirt when she turned in her restless march. That tune

had run down at last--thank goodness! He crossed the floor and looked

through the farther window at the water slow-flowing past the lilies.

It made little bubbles against them, bright where a moon-streak fell.

He remembered suddenly that early morning when he had slept on the

house-boat after his father died, and she had just been born--nearly

nineteen years ago! Even now he recalled the unaccustomed world when

he woke up, the strange feeling it had given him. That day the second

passion of his life began--for this girl of his, roaming under the

acacias. What a comfort she had been to him! And all the soreness and

sense of outrage left him. If he could make her happy again, he didn't

care! An owl flew, queeking, queeking; a bat flitted by; the moonlight

brightened and broadened on the water. How long was she going to roam

about like this! He went back to the window, and suddenly saw her coming

down to the bank. She stood quite close, on the landing-stage. And

Soames watched, clenching his hands. Should he speak to her? His

excitement was intense. The stillness of her figure, its youth, its

absorption in despair, in longing, in--itself. He would always remember

it, moonlit like that; and the faint sweet reek of the river and the

shivering of the willow leaves. She had everything in the world that he

could give her, except the one thing that she could not have because

of him! The perversity of things hurt him at that moment, as might a

fish-bone in his throat.

Then, with an infinite relief, he saw her turn back toward the house.

What could he give her to make amends? Pearls, travel, horses, other

young men--anything she wanted--that he might lose the memory of her

young figure lonely by the water! There! She had set that tune going

again! Why--it was a mania! Dark, thrumming, faint, travelling from the

house. It was as though she had said: "If I can't have something to keep

me going, I shall die of this!" Soames dimly understood. Well, if it

helped her, let her keep it thrumming on all night! And, mousing back

through the fruit garden, he regained the verandah. Though he meant to

go in and speak to her now, he still hesitated, not knowing what to say,

trying hard to recall how it felt to be thwarted in love. He ought to

know, ought to remember--and he could not! Gone--all real recollection;

except that it had hurt him horribly. In this blankness he stood passing

his handkerchief over hands and lips, which were very dry. By craning

his head he could just see Fleur, standing with her back to that piano

still grinding out its tune, her arms tight crossed on her breast, a

lighted cigarette between her lips, whose smoke half veiled her face.

The expression on it was strange to Soames, the eyes shone and stared,

and every feature was alive with a sort of wretched scorn and anger.

Once or twice he had seen Annette look like that--the face was too

vivid, too naked, not his daughter's at that moment. And he dared not go

in, realising the futility of any attempt at consolation. He sat down in

the shadow of the ingle-nook.

Monstrous trick, that Fate had played him! Nemesis! That old unhappy

marriage! And in God's name-why? How was he to know, when he wanted

Irene so violently, and she consented to be his, that she would never

love him? The tune died and was renewed, and died again, and still

Soames sat in the shadow, waiting for he knew not what. The fag of

Fleur's cigarette, flung through the window, fell on the grass; he

watched it glowing, burning itself out. The moon had freed herself above

the poplars, and poured her unreality on the garden. Comfortless light,

mysterious, withdrawn--like the beauty of that woman who had never loved

him--dappling the nemesias and the stocks with a vesture not of earth.

Flowers! And his flower so unhappy! Ah! Why could one not put happiness

into Local Loans, gild its edges, insure it against going down?

Light had ceased to flow out now from the drawing-room window. All was

silent and dark in there. Had she gone up? He rose, and, tiptoeing,

peered in. It seemed so! He entered. The verandah kept the moonlight

out; and at first he could see nothing but the outlines of furniture

blacker than the darkness. He groped toward the farther window to shut

it. His foot struck a chair, and he heard a gasp. There she was, curled

and crushed into the corner of the sofa! His hand hovered. Did she want

his consolation? He stood, gazing at that ball of crushed frills and

hair and graceful youth, trying to burrow its way out of sorrow. How

leave her there? At last he touched her hair, and said:

"Come, darling, better go to bed. I'll make it up to you, somehow." How

fatuous! But what could he have said?

IX.--UNDER THE OAK-TREE

When their visitor had disappeared Jon and his mother stood without

speaking, till he said suddenly:

"I ought to have seen him out."

But Soames was already walking down the drive, and Jon went upstairs to

his father's studio, not trusting himself to go back.

The expression on his mother's face confronting the man she had once

been married to, had sealed a resolution growing within him ever

since she left him the night before. It had put the finishing touch

of reality. To marry Fleur would be to hit his mother in the face; to

betray his dead father! It was no good! Jon had the least resentful of

natures. He bore his parents no grudge in this hour of his distress. For

one so young there was a rather strange power in him of seeing things

in some sort of proportion. It was worse for Fleur, worse for his mother

even, than it was for him. Harder than to give up was to be given up,

or to be the cause of some one you loved giving up for you. He must not,

would not behave grudgingly! While he stood watching the tardy sunlight,

he had again that sudden vision of the world which had come to him the

night before. Sea on sea, country on country, millions on millions

of people, all with their own lives, energies, joys, griefs, and

suffering--all with things they had to give up, and separate struggles

for existence. Even though he might be willing to give up all else for

the one thing he couldn't have, he would be a fool to think his feelings

mattered much in so vast a world, and to behave like a cry-baby or a

cad. He pictured the people who had nothing--the millions who had given

up life in the War, the millions whom the War had left with life and

little else; the hungry children he had read of, the shattered men;

people in prison, every kind of unfortunate. And--they did not help him

much. If one had to miss a meal, what comfort in the knowledge that many

others had to miss it too? There was more distraction in the thought of

getting away out into this vast world of which he knew nothing yet. He

could not go on staying here, walled in and sheltered, with everything

so slick and comfortable, and nothing to do but brood and think what

might have been. He could not go back to Wansdon, and the memories of

Fleur. If he saw her again he could not trust himself; and if he stayed

here or went back there, he would surely see her. While they were within

reach of each other that must happen. To go far away and quickly was the

only thing to do. But, however much he loved his mother, he did not want

to go away with her. Then feeling that was brutal, he made up his mind

desperately to propose that they should go to Italy. For two hours in

that melancholy room he tried to master himself, then dressed solemnly

for dinner.

His mother had done the same. They ate little, at some length, and

talked of his father's catalogue. The show was arranged for October, and

beyond clerical detail there was nothing more to do.

After dinner she put on a cloak and they went out; walked a little,

talked a little, till they were standing silent at last beneath the

oak-tree. Ruled by the thought: 'If I show anything, I show all,' Jon

put his arm through hers and said quite casually:

"Mother, let's go to Italy."

Irene pressed his arm, and said as casually:

"It would be very nice; but I've been thinking you ought to see and do

more than you would if I were with you."

"But then you'd be alone."

"I was once alone for more than twelve years. Besides, I should like to

be here for the opening of Father's show."

Jon's grip tightened round her arm; he was not deceived.

"You couldn't stay here all by yourself; it's too big."

"Not here, perhaps. In London, and I might go to Paris, after the show

opens. You ought to have a year at least, Jon, and see the world."

"Yes, I'd like to see the world and rough it. But I don't want to leave

you all alone."

"My dear, I owe you that at least. If it's for your good, it'll be for

mine. Why not start tomorrow? You've got your passport."

"Yes; if I'm going it had better be at once. Only--Mother--if--if I

wanted to stay out somewhere--America or anywhere, would you mind coming

presently?"

"Wherever and whenever you send for me. But don't send until you really

want me."

Jon drew a deep breath.

"I feel England's choky."

They stood a few minutes longer under the oak-tree--looking out to where

the grand stand at Epsom was veiled in evening. The branches kept the

moonlight from them, so that it only fell everywhere else--over the

fields and far away, and on the windows of the creepered house behind,

which soon would be to let.

X.--FLEUR'S WEDDING

The October paragraphs describing the wedding of Fleur Forsyte to

Michael Mont hardly conveyed the symbolic significance of this event. In

the union of the great-granddaughter of "Superior Dosset" with the heir

of a ninth baronet was the outward and visible sign of that merger of

class in class which buttresses the political stability of a realm. The

time had come when the Forsytes might resign their natural resentment

against a "flummery" not theirs by birth, and accept it as the still

more natural due of their possessive instincts. Besides, they had to

mount to make room for all those so much more newly rich. In that

quiet but tasteful ceremony in Hanover Square, and afterward among the

furniture in Green Street, it had been impossible for those not in the

know to distinguish the Forsyte troop from the Mont contingent--so

far away was "Superior Dosset" now. Was there, in the crease of his

trousers, the expression of his moustache, his accent, or the shine

on his top-hat, a pin to choose between Soames and the ninth baronet

himself? Was not Fleur as self-possessed, quick, glancing, pretty,

and hard as the likeliest Muskham, Mont, or Charwell filly present? If

anything, the Forsytes had it in dress and looks and manners. They had

become "upper class" and now their name would be formally recorded in

the Stud Book, their money joined to land. Whether this was a little

late in the day, and those rewards of the possessive instinct, lands and

money, destined for the melting-pot--was still a question so moot that

it was not mooted. After all, Timothy had said Consols were goin'

up. Timothy, the last, the missing link; Timothy, in extremis on the

Bayswater Road--so Francie had reported. It was whispered, too, that

this young Mont was a sort of socialist--strangely wise of him, and in

the nature of insurance, considering the days they lived in. There was

no uneasiness on that score. The landed classes produced that sort

of amiable foolishness at times, turned to safe uses and confined to

theory. As George remarked to his sister Francie: "They'll soon be

having puppies--that'll give him pause."

The church with white flowers and something blue in the middle of

the East window looked extremely chaste, as though endeavouring to

counteract the somewhat lurid phraseology of a Service calculated to

keep the thoughts of all on puppies. Forsytes, Haymans, Tweetymans,

sat in the left aisle; Monts, Charwells; Muskhams in the right; while

a sprinkling of Fleur's fellow-sufferers at school, and of Mont's

fellow-sufferers in, the War, gaped indiscriminately from either side,

and three maiden ladies, who had dropped in on their way from Skyward's

brought up the rear, together with two Mont retainers and Fleur's old

nurse. In the unsettled state of the country as full a house as could be

expected.

Mrs. Val Dartie, who sat with her husband in the third row, squeezed his

hand more than once during the performance. To her, who knew the plot

of this tragi-comedy, its most dramatic moment was well-nigh painful.

'I wonder if Jon knows by instinct,' she thought--Jon, out in British

Columbia. She had received a letter from him only that morning which had

made her smile and say:

"Jon's in British Columbia, Val, because he wants to be in California.

He thinks it's too nice there."

"Oh!" said Val, "so he's beginning to see a joke again."

"He's bought some land and sent for his mother."

"What on earth will she do out there?"

"All she cares about is Jon. Do you still think it a happy release?"

Val's shrewd eyes narrowed to grey pin-points between their dark lashes.

"Fleur wouldn't have suited him a bit. She's not bred right."

"Poor little Fleur!" sighed Holly. Ah! it was strange--this marriage.

The young man, Mont, had caught her on the rebound, of course, in the

reckless mood of one whose ship has just gone down. Such a plunge could

not but be--as Val put it--an outside chance. There was little to be

told from the back view of her young cousin's veil, and Holly's eyes

reviewed the general aspect of this Christian wedding. She, who had

made a love-match which had been successful, had a horror of unhappy

marriages. This might not be one in the end--but it was clearly a

toss-up; and to consecrate a toss-up in this fashion with manufactured

unction before a crowd of fashionable free-thinkers--for who thought

otherwise than freely, or not at all, when they were "dolled" up--seemed

to her as near a sin as one could find in an age which had abolished

them. Her eyes wandered from the prelate in his robes (a Charwell-the

Forsytes had not as yet produced a prelate) to Val, beside her,

thinking--she was certain--of the Mayfly filly at fifteen to one for

the Cambridgeshire. They passed on and caught the profile of the ninth

baronet, in counterfeitment of the kneeling process. She could just see

the neat ruck above his knees where he had pulled his trousers up, and

thought: 'Val's forgotten to pull up his!' Her eyes passed to the pew in

front of her, where Winifred's substantial form was gowned with passion,

and on again to Soames and Annette kneeling side by side. A little

smile came on her lips--Prosper Profond, back from the South Seas of the

Channel, would be kneeling too, about six rows behind. Yes! This was a

funny "small" business, however it turned out; still it was in a proper

church and would be in the proper papers to-morrow morning.

They had begun a hymn; she could hear the ninth baronet across the

aisle, singing of the hosts of Midian. Her little finger touched Val's

thumb--they were holding the same hymn-book--and a tiny thrill passed

through her, preserved--from twenty years ago. He stooped and whispered:

"I say, d'you remember the rat?" The rat at their wedding in Cape

Colony, which had cleaned its whiskers behind the table at the

Registrar's! And between her little and third forgers she squeezed his

thumb hard.

The hymn was over, the prelate had begun to deliver his discourse. He

told them of the dangerous times they lived in, and the awful conduct

of the House of Lords in connection with divorce. They were all

soldiers--he said--in the trenches under the poisonous gas of the Prince

of Darkness, and must be manful. The purpose of marriage was children,

not mere sinful happiness.

An imp danced in Holly's eyes--Val's eyelashes were meeting. Whatever

happened; he must not snore. Her finger and thumb closed on his thigh

till he stirred uneasily.

The discourse was over, the danger past. They were signing in the

vestry; and general relaxation had set in.

A voice behind her said:

"Will she stay the course?"

"Who's that?" she whispered.

"Old George Forsyte!"

Holly demurely scrutinized one of whom she had often heard. Fresh

from South Africa, and ignorant of her kith and kin, she never saw one

without an almost childish curiosity. He was very big, and very dapper;

his eyes gave her a funny feeling of having no particular clothes.

"They're off!" she heard him say.

They came, stepping from the chancel. Holly looked first in young Mont's

face. His lips and ears were twitching, his eyes, shifting from his feet

to the hand within his arm, stared suddenly before them as if to face

a firing party. He gave Holly the feeling that he was spiritually

intoxicated. But Fleur! Ah! That was different. The girl was perfectly

composed, prettier than ever, in her white robes and veil over her

banged dark chestnut hair; her eyelids hovered demure over her dark

hazel eyes. Outwardly, she seemed all there. But inwardly, where was

she? As those two passed, Fleur raised her eyelids--the restless glint

of those clear whites remained on Holly's vision as might the flutter of

caged bird's wings.

In Green Street Winifred stood to receive, just a little less composed

than usual. Soames' request for the use of her house had come on her

at a deeply psychological moment. Under the influence of a remark

of Prosper Profond, she had begun to exchange her Empire for

Expressionistic furniture. There were the most amusing arrangements,

with violet, green, and orange blobs and scriggles, to be had at

Mealard's. Another month and the change would have been complete. Just

now, the very "intriguing" recruits she had enlisted, did not march too

well with the old guard. It was as if her regiment were half in khaki,

half in scarlet and bearskins. But her strong and comfortable character

made the best of it in a drawing-room which typified, perhaps, more

perfectly than she imagined, the semi-bolshevized imperialism of her

country. After all, this was a day of merger, and you couldn't have too

much of it! Her eyes travelled indulgently among her guests. Soames had

gripped the back of a buhl chair; young Mont was behind that "awfully

amusing" screen, which no one as yet had been able to explain to her.

The ninth baronet had shied violently at a round scarlet table, inlaid

under glass with blue Australian butteries' wings, and was clinging

to her Louis-Quinze cabinet; Francie Forsyte had seized the new

mantel-board, finely carved with little purple grotesques on an ebony

ground; George, over by the old spinet, was holding a little sky-blue

book as if about to enter bets; Prosper Profond was twiddling the knob

of the open door, black with peacock-blue panels; and Annette's hands,

close by, were grasping her own waist; two Muskhams clung to the balcony

among the plants, as if feeling ill; Lady Mont, thin and brave-looking,

had taken up her long-handled glasses and was gazing at the central

light shade, of ivory and orange dashed with deep magenta, as if the

heavens had opened. Everybody, in fact, seemed holding on to something.

Only Fleur, still in her bridal dress, was detached from all support,

flinging her words and glances to left and right.

The room was full of the bubble and the squeak of conversation.

Nobody could hear anything that anybody said; which seemed of little

consequence, since no one waited for anything so slow as an answer.

Modern conversation seemed to Winifred so different from the days of her

prime, when a drawl was all the vogue. Still it was "amusing," which,

of course, was all that mattered. Even the Forsytes were talking

with extreme rapidity--Fleur and Christopher, and Imogen, and young

Nicholas's youngest, Patrick. Soames, of course, was silent; but

George, by the spinet, kept up a running commentary, and Francie, by her

mantel-shelf. Winifred drew nearer to the ninth baronet. He seemed to

promise a certain repose; his nose was fine and drooped a little, his

grey moustaches too; and she said, drawling through her smile:

"It's rather nice, isn't it?"

His reply shot out of his smile like a snipped bread pellet

"D'you remember, in Frazer, the tribe that buries the bride up to the

waist?"

He spoke as fast as anybody! He had dark lively little eyes, too, all

crinkled round like a Catholic priest's. Winifred felt suddenly he might

say things she would regret.

"They're always so amusing--weddings," she murmured, and moved on

to Soames. He was curiously still, and Winifred saw at once what was

dictating his immobility. To his right was George Forsyte, to his left

Annette and Prosper Profond. He could not move without either seeing

those two together, or the reflection of them in George Forsyte's japing

eyes. He was quite right not to be taking notice.

"They say Timothy's sinking;" he said glumly.

"Where will you put him, Soames?"

"Highgate." He counted on his fingers. "It'll make twelve of them there,

including wives. How do you think Fleur looks?"

"Remarkably well."

Soames nodded. He had never seen her look prettier, yet he could not rid

himself of the impression that this business was unnatural--remembering

still that crushed figure burrowing into the corner of the sofa. From

that night to this day he had received from her no confidences. He knew

from his chauffeur that she had made one more attempt on Robin Hill

and drawn blank--an empty house, no one at home. He knew that she had

received a letter, but not what was in it, except that it had made her

hide herself and cry. He had remarked that she looked at him sometimes

when she thought he wasn't noticing, as if she were wondering still what

he had done--forsooth--to make those people hate him so. Well, there

it was! Annette had come back, and things had worn on through the

summer--very miserable, till suddenly Fleur had said she was going to

marry young Mont. She had shown him a little more affection when she

told him that. And he had yielded--what was the good of opposing it? God

knew that he had never wished to thwart her in anything! And the young

man seemed quite delirious about her. No doubt she was in a reckless

mood, and she was young, absurdly young. But if he opposed her, he

didn't know what she would do; for all he could tell she might want to

take up a profession, become a doctor or solicitor, some nonsense. She

had no aptitude for painting, writing, music, in his view the legitimate

occupations of unmarried women, if they must do something in these

days. On the whole, she was safer married, for he could see too well how

feverish and restless she was at home. Annette, too, had been in favour

of it--Annette, from behind the veil of his refusal to know what she was

about, if she was about anything. Annette had said: "Let her marry this

young man. He is a nice boy--not so highty-flighty as he seems." Where

she got her expressions, he didn't know--but her opinion soothed his

doubts. His wife, whatever her conduct, had clear eyes and an almost

depressing amount of common sense. He had settled fifty thousand on

Fleur, taking care that there was no cross settlement in case it didn't

turn out well. Could it turn out well? She had not got over that other

boy--he knew. They were to go to Spain for the honeymoon. He would be

even lonelier when she was gone. But later, perhaps, she would forget,

and turn to him again! Winifred's voice broke on his reverie.

"Why! Of all wonders-June!"

There, in a djibbah--what things she wore!--with her hair straying from

under a fillet, Soames saw his cousin, and Fleur going forward to greet

her. The two passed from their view out on to the stairway.

"Really," said Winifred, "she does the most impossible things! Fancy her

coming!"

"What made you ask her?" muttered Soames.

"Because I thought she wouldn't accept, of course."

Winifred had forgotten that behind conduct lies the main trend of

character; or, in other words, omitted to remember that Fleur was now a

"lame duck."

On receiving her invitation, June had first thought, 'I wouldn't go near

them for the world!' and then, one morning, had awakened from a dream of

Fleur waving to her from a boat with a wild unhappy gesture. And she had

changed her mind.

When Fleur came forward and said to her, "Do come up while I'm changing

my dress," she had followed up the stairs. The girl led the way into

Imogen's old bedroom, set ready for her toilet.

June sat down on the bed, thin and upright, like a little spirit in the

sear and yellow. Fleur locked the door.

The girl stood before her divested of her wedding dress. What a pretty

thing she was!

"I suppose you think me a fool," she said, with quivering lips, "when it

was to have been Jon. But what does it matter? Michael wants me, and

I don't care. It'll get me away from home." Diving her hand into the

frills on her breast, she brought out a letter. "Jon wrote me this."

June read: "Lake Okanagen, British Columbia. I'm not coming back to

England. Bless you always. Jon."

"She's made safe, you see," said Fleur.

June handed back the letter.

"That's not fair to Irene," she said, "she always told Jon he could do

as he wished."

Fleur smiled bitterly. "Tell me, didn't she spoil your life too?" June

looked up. "Nobody can spoil a life, my dear. That's nonsense. Things

happen, but we bob up."

With a sort of terror she saw the girl sink on her knees and bury her

face in the djibbah. A strangled sob mounted to June's ears.

"It's all right--all right," she murmured, "Don't! There, there!"

But the point of the girl's chin was pressed ever closer into her thigh,

and the sound was dreadful of her sobbing.

Well, well! It had to come. She would feel better afterward! June

stroked the short hair of that shapely head; and all the scattered

mother-sense in her focussed itself and passed through the tips of her

fingers into the girl's brain.

"Don't sit down under it, my dear," she said at last. "We can't control

life, but we can fight it. Make the best of things. I've had to. I held

on, like you; and I cried, as you're crying now. And look at me!"

Fleur raised her head; a sob merged suddenly into a little choked laugh.

In truth it was a thin and rather wild and wasted spirit she was looking

at, but it had brave eyes.

"All right!" she said. "I'm sorry. I shall forget him, I suppose, if I

fly fast and far enough."

And, scrambling to her feet, she went over to the wash-stand.

June watched her removing with cold water the traces of emotion. Save

for a little becoming pinkness there was nothing left when she stood

before the mirror. June got off the bed and took a pin-cushion in her

hand. To put two pins into the wrong places was all the vent she found

for sympathy.

"Give me a kiss," she said when Fleur was ready, and dug her chin into

the girl's warm cheek.

"I want a whiff," said Fleur; "don't wait."

June left her, sitting on the bed with a cigarette between her lips

and her eyes half closed, and went down-stairs. In the doorway of the

drawing-room stood Soames as if unquiet at his daughter's tardiness.

June tossed her head and passed down on to the half-landing. Her cousin

Francie was standing there.

"Look!" said June, pointing with her chin at Soames. "That man's fatal!"

"How do you mean," said Francie, "fatal?"

June did not answer her. "I shan't wait to see them off," she said.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Francie, and her eyes, of a Celtic grey, goggled. That

old feud! Really, it was quite romantic!

Soames, moving to the well of the staircase, saw June go, and drew a

breath of satisfaction. Why didn't Fleur come? They would miss their

train. That train would bear her away from him, yet he could not help

fidgeting at the thought that they would lose it. And then she did come,

running down in her tan-coloured frock and black velvet cap, and passed

him into the drawing-room. He saw her kiss her mother, her aunt, Val's

wife, Imogen, and then come forth, quick and pretty as ever. How would

she treat him at this last moment of her girlhood? He couldn't hope for

much!

Her lips pressed the middle of his cheek.

"Daddy!" she said, and was past and gone! Daddy! She hadn't called him

that for years. He drew a long breath and followed slowly down. There

was all the folly with that confetti stuff and the rest of it to go

through with yet. But he would like just to catch her smile, if she

leaned out, though they would hit her in the eye with the shoe, if they

didn't take care. Young Mont's voice said fervently in his ear:

"Good-bye, sir; and thank you! I'm so fearfully bucked."

"Good-bye," he said; "don't miss your train."

He stood on the bottom step but three, whence he could see above the

heads--the silly hats and heads. They were in the car now; and there

was that stuff, showering, and there went the shoe. A flood of something

welled up in Soames, and--he didn't know--he couldn't see!

XI.--THE LAST OF THE OLD FORSYTES

When they came to prepare that terrific symbol Timothy Forsyte--the

one pure individualist left, the only man who hadn't heard of the

Great War--they found him wonderful--not even death had undermined his

soundness.

To Smither and Cook that preparation came like final evidence of what

they had never believed possible--the end of the old Forsyte family on

earth. Poor Mr. Timothy must now take a harp and sing in the company of

Miss Forsyte, Mrs. Julia, Miss Hester; with Mr. Jolyon, Mr. Swithin,

Mr. James, Mr. Roger, and Mr. Nicholas of the party. Whether Mrs. Hayman

would be there was more doubtful, seeing that she had been cremated.

Secretly Cook thought that Mr. Timothy would be upset--he had always

been so set against barrel organs. How many times had she not said:

"Drat the thing! There it is again! Smither, you'd better run up and see

what you can do." And in her heart she would so have enjoyed the tunes,

if she hadn't known that Mr. Timothy would ring the bell in a minute and

say: "Here, take him a halfpenny and tell him to move on." Often they

had been obliged to add threepence of their own before the man would

go--Timothy had ever underrated the value of emotion. Luckily he had

taken the organs for blue-bottles in his last years, which had been a

comfort, and they had been able to enjoy the tunes. But a harp! Cook

wondered. It was a change! And Mr. Timothy had never liked change. But

she did not speak of this to Smither, who did so take a line of her own

in regard to heaven that it quite put one about sometimes.

She cried while Timothy was being prepared, and they all had sherry

afterward out of the yearly Christmas bottle, which would not be needed

now. Ah! dear! She had been there five-and-forty years and Smither

three-and-forty! And now they would be going to a tiny house in Tooting,

to live on their savings and what Miss Hester had so kindly left

them--for to take fresh service after the glorious past--No! But they

would like just to see Mr. Soames again, and Mrs. Dartie, and Miss

Francie, and Miss Euphemia. And even if they had to take their own cab,

they felt they must go to the funeral. For six years Mr. Timothy had

been their baby, getting younger and younger every day, till at last he

had been too young to live.

They spent the regulation hours of waiting in polishing and dusting, in

catching the one mouse left, and asphyxiating the last beetle so as to

leave it nice, discussing with each other what they would buy at the

sale. Miss Ann's workbox; Miss Juley's (that is Mrs. Julia's) seaweed

album; the fire-screen Miss Hester had crewelled; and Mr. Timothy's

hair--little golden curls, glued into a black frame. Oh! they must have

those--only the price of things had gone up so!

It fell to Soames to issue invitations for the funeral. He had them

drawn up by Gradman in his office--only blood relations, and no flowers.

Six carriages were ordered. The Will would be read afterward at the

house.

He arrived at eleven o'clock to see that all was ready. At a quarter

past old Gradman came in black gloves and crape on his hat. He and

Soames stood in the drawing-room waiting. At half-past eleven the

carriages drew up in a long row. But no one else appeared. Gradman said:

"It surprises me, Mr. Soames. I posted them myself."

"I don't know," said Soames; "he'd lost touch with the family." Soames

had often noticed in old days how much more neighbourly his family were

to the dead than to the living. But, now, the way they had flocked to

Fleur's wedding and abstained from Timothy's funeral, seemed to show

some vital change. There might, of course, be another reason; for Soames

felt that if he had not known the contents of Timothy's Will, he might

have stayed away himself through delicacy. Timothy had left a lot of

money, with nobody in particular to leave it to. They mightn't like to

seem to expect something.

At twelve o'clock the procession left the door; Timothy alone in the

first carriage under glass. Then Soames alone; then Gradman alone;

then Cook and Smither together. They started at a walk, but were soon

trotting under a bright sky. At the entrance to Highgate Cemetery they

were delayed by service in the Chapel. Soames would have liked to stay

outside in the sunshine. He didn't believe a word of it; on the other

hand, it was a form of insurance which could not safely be neglected, in

case there might be something in it after all.

They walked up two and two--he and Gradman, Cook and Smither--to the

family vault. It was not very distinguished for the funeral of the last

old Forsyte.

He took Gradman into his carriage on the way back to the Bayswater Road

with a certain glow in his heart. He had a surprise in pickle for the

old chap who had served the Forsytes four-and-fifty years-a treat that

was entirely his doing. How well he remembered saying to Timothy the

day--after Aunt Hester's funeral: "Well; Uncle Timothy, there's Gradman.

He's taken a lot of trouble for the family. What do you say to leaving

him five thousand?" and his surprise, seeing the difficulty there had

been in getting Timothy to leave anything, when Timothy had nodded.

And now the old chap would be as pleased as Punch, for Mrs. Gradman, he

knew, had a weak heart, and their son had lost a leg in the War. It

was extraordinarily gratifying to Soames to have left him five thousand

pounds of Timothy's money. They sat down together in the little

drawing-room, whose walls--like a vision of heaven--were sky-blue and

gold with every picture-frame unnaturally bright, and every speck

of dust removed from every piece of furniture, to read that little

masterpiece--the Will of Timothy. With his back to the light in Aunt

Hester's chair, Soames faced Gradman with his face to the light, on Aunt

Ann's sofa; and, crossing his legs, began:

"This is the last Will and Testament of me Timothy Forsyte of The Bower

Bayswater Road, London I appoint my nephew Soames Forsyte of The Shelter

Mapleduram and Thomas Gradman of 159 Folly Road Highgate (hereinafter

called my Trustees) to be the trustees and executors of this my Will To

the said Soames Forsyte I leave the sum of one thousand pounds free

of legacy duty and to the said Thomas Gradman I leave the sum of five

thousand pounds free of legacy duty."

Soames paused. Old Gradman was leaning forward, convulsively gripping a

stout black knee with each of his thick hands; his mouth had fallen

open so that the gold fillings of three teeth gleamed; his eyes were

blinking, two tears rolled slowly out of them. Soames read hastily on.

"All the rest of my property of whatsoever description I bequeath to

my Trustees upon Trust to convert and hold the same upon the following

trusts namely To pay thereout all my debts funeral expenses and

outgoings of any kind in connection with my Will and to hold the residue

thereof in trust for that male lineal descendant of my father Jolyon

Forsyte by his marriage with Ann Pierce who after the decease of all

lineal descendants whether male or female of my said father by his said

marriage in being at the time of my death shall last attain the age of

twenty-one years absolutely it being my desire that my property shall

be nursed to the extreme limit permitted by the laws of England for the

benefit of such male lineal descendant as aforesaid."

Soames read the investment and attestation clauses, and, ceasing,

looked at Gradman. The old fellow was wiping his brow with a large

handkerchief, whose brilliant colour supplied a sudden festive tinge to

the proceedings.

"My word, Mr. Soames!" he said, and it was clear that the lawyer in him

had utterly wiped out the man: "My word! Why, there are two babies now,

and some quite young children--if one of them lives to be eighty--it's

not a great age--and add twenty-one--that's a hundred years; and Mr.

Timothy worth a hundred and fifty thousand pound net if he's worth

a penny. Compound interest at five per cent. doubles you in fourteen

years. In fourteen years three hundred thousand-six hundred thousand in

twenty-eight--twelve hundred thousand in forty-two--twenty-four

hundred thousand in fifty-six--four million eight hundred thousand in

seventy--nine million six hundred thousand in eighty-four--Why, in a

hundred years it'll be twenty million! And we shan't live to use it! It

is a Will!"

Soames said dryly: "Anything may happen. The State might take the lot;

they're capable of anything in these days."

"And carry five," said Gradman to himself. "I forgot--Mr. Timothy's in

Consols; we shan't get more than two per cent. with this income tax. To

be on the safe side, say eight millions. Still, that's a pretty penny."

Soames rose and handed him the Will. "You're going into the City. Take

care of that, and do what's necessary. Advertise; but there are no

debts. When's the sale?"

"Tuesday week," said Gradman. "Life or lives in bein' and twenty-one

years afterward--it's a long way off. But I'm glad he's left it in the

family...."

The sale--not at Jobson's, in view of the Victorian nature of the

effects--was far more freely attended than the funeral, though not by

Cook and Smither, for Soames had taken it on himself to give them

their heart's desires. Winifred was present, Euphemia, and Francie,

and Eustace had come in his car. The miniatures, Barbizons, and J. R.

drawings had been bought in by Soames; and relics of no marketable value

were set aside in an off-room for members of the family who cared

to have mementoes. These were the only restrictions upon bidding

characterised by an almost tragic languor. Not one piece of furniture,

no picture or porcelain figure appealed to modern taste. The humming

birds had fallen like autumn leaves when taken from where they had not

hummed for sixty years. It was painful to Soames to see the chairs his

aunts had sat on, the little grand piano they had practically never

played, the books whose outsides they had gazed at, the china they had

dusted, the curtains they had drawn, the hearth-rug which had warmed

their feet; above all, the beds they had lain and died in--sold to

little dealers, and the housewives of Fulham. And yet--what could one

do? Buy them and stick them in a lumber-room? No; they had to go the way

of all flesh and furniture, and be worn out. But when they put up Aunt

Ann's sofa and were going to knock it down for thirty shillings, he

cried out, suddenly: "Five pounds!" The sensation was considerable, and

the sofa his.

When that little sale was over in the fusty saleroom, and those

Victorian ashes scattered, he went out into the misty October sunshine

feeling as if cosiness had died out of the world, and the board "To Let"

was up, indeed. Revolutions on the horizon; Fleur in Spain; no comfort

in Annette; no Timothy's on the Bayswater Road. In the irritable

desolation of his soul he went into the Goupenor Gallery. That chap

Jolyon's watercolours were on view there. He went in to look down his

nose at them--it might give him some faint satisfaction. The news had

trickled through from June to Val's wife, from her to Val, from Val to

his mother, from her to Soames, that the house--the fatal house at

Robin Hill--was for sale, and Irene going to join her boy out in British

Columbia, or some such place. For one wild moment the thought had come

to Soames: 'Why shouldn't I buy it back? I meant it for my!' No sooner

come than gone. Too lugubrious a triumph; with too many humiliating

memories for himself and Fleur. She would never live there after what

had happened. No, the place must go its way to some peer or profiteer.

It had been a bone of contention from the first, the shell of the feud;

and with the woman gone, it was an empty shell. "For Sale or To Let."

With his mind's eye he could see that board raised high above the ivied

wall which he had built.

He passed through the first of the two rooms in the Gallery. There was

certainly a body of work! And now that the fellow was dead it did not

seem so trivial. The drawings were pleasing enough, with quite a sense

of atmosphere, and something individual in the brush work. 'His father

and my father; he and I; his child and mine!' thought Soames. So it had

gone on! And all about that woman! Softened by the events of the past

week, affected by the melancholy beauty of the autumn day, Soames came

nearer than he had ever been to realisation of that truth--passing the

understanding of a Forsyte pure--that the body of Beauty has a spiritual

essence, uncapturable save by a devotion which thinks not of self. After

all, he was near that truth in his devotion to his daughter; perhaps

that made him understand a little how he had missed the prize. And

there, among the drawings of his kinsman, who had attained to that

which he had found beyond his reach, he thought of him and her with a

tolerance which surprised him. But he did not buy a drawing.

Just as he passed the seat of custom on his return to the outer air he

met with a contingency which had not been entirely absent from his mind

when he went into the Gallery--Irene, herself, coming in. So she had not

gone yet, and was still paying farewell visits to that fellow's remains!

He subdued the little involuntary leap of his subconsciousness, the

mechanical reaction of his senses to the charm of this once-owned woman,

and passed her with averted eyes. But when he had gone by he could not

for the life of him help looking back. This, then, was finality--the

heat and stress of his life, the madness and the longing thereof, the

only defeat he had known, would be over when she faded from his view

this time; even such memories had their own queer aching value.

She, too, was looking back. Suddenly she lifted her gloved hand, her

lips smiled faintly, her dark eyes seemed to speak. It was the turn of

Soames to make no answer to that smile and that little farewell wave;

he went out into the fashionable street quivering from head to foot. He

knew what she had meant to say: "Now that I am going for ever out of

the reach of you and yours--forgive me; I wish you well." That was the

meaning; last sign of that terrible reality--passing morality, duty,

common sense--her aversion from him who had owned her body, but had

never touched her spirit or her heart. It hurt; yes--more than if she

had kept her mask unmoved, her hand unlifted.

Three days later, in that fast-yellowing October, Soames took a taxi-cab

to Highgate Cemetery and mounted through its white forest to the Forsyte

vault. Close to the cedar, above catacombs and columbaria, tall, ugly,

and individual, it looked like an apex of the competitive system. He

could remember a discussion wherein Swithin had advocated the addition

to its face of the pheasant proper. The proposal had been rejected in

favour of a wreath in stone, above the stark words: "The family vault

of Jolyon Forsyte: 1850." It was in good order. All trace of the recent

interment had been removed, and its sober grey gloomed reposefully in

the sunshine. The whole family lay there now, except old Jolyon's wife,

who had gone back under a contract to her own family vault in Suffolk;

old Jolyon himself lying at Robin Hill; and Susan Hayman, cremated

so that none knew where she might be. Soames gazed at it with

satisfaction--massive, needing little attention; and this was important,

for he was well aware that no one would attend to it when he himself was

gone, and he would have to be looking out for lodgings soon. He might

have twenty years before him, but one never knew. Twenty years without

an aunt or uncle, with a wife of whom one had better not know anything,

with a daughter gone from home. His mood inclined to melancholy and

retrospection.

This cemetery was full, they said--of people with extraordinary names,

buried in extraordinary taste. Still, they had a fine view up here,

right over London. Annette had once given him a story to read by that

Frenchman, Maupassant, most lugubrious concern, where all the skeletons

emerged from their graves one night, and all the pious inscriptions on

the stones were altered to descriptions of their sins. Not a true story

at all. He didn't know about the French, but there was not much real

harm in English people except their teeth and their taste, which was

certainly deplorable. "The family vault of Jolyon Forsyte: 1850." A

lot of people had been buried here since then--a lot of English life

crumbled to mould and dust! The boom of an airplane passing under the

gold-tinted clouds caused him to lift his eyes. The deuce of a lot of

expansion had gone on. But it all came back to a cemetery--to a name and

a date on a tomb. And he thought with a curious pride that he and his

family had done little or nothing to help this feverish expansion.

Good solid middlemen, they had gone to work with dignity to manage and

possess. "Superior Dosset," indeed, had built in a dreadful, and Jolyon

painted in a doubtful, period, but so far as he remembered not another

of them all had soiled his hands by creating anything--unless you

counted Val Dartie and his horse-breeding. Collectors, solicitors,

barristers, merchants, publishers, accountants, directors, land agents,

even soldiers--there they had been! The country had expanded, as it

were, in spite of them. They had checked, controlled, defended, and

taken advantage of the process and when you considered how "Superior

Dosset" had begun life with next to nothing, and his lineal descendants

already owned what old Gradman estimated at between a million and a

million and a half, it was not so bad! And yet he sometimes felt as

if the family bolt was shot, their possessive instinct dying out. They

seemed unable to make money--this fourth generation; they were going

into art, literature, farming, or the army; or just living on what was

left them--they had no push and no tenacity. They would die out if they

didn't take care.

Soames turned from the vault and faced toward the breeze. The air up

here would be delicious if only he could rid his nerves of the feeling

that mortality was in it. He gazed restlessly at the crosses and the

urns, the angels, the "immortelles," the flowers, gaudy or withering;

and suddenly he noticed a spot which seemed so different from anything

else up there that he was obliged to walk the few necessary yards and

look at it. A sober corner, with a massive queer-shaped cross of grey

rough-hewn granite, guarded by four dark yew-trees. The spot was free

from the pressure of the other graves, having a little box-hedged garden

on the far side, and in front a goldening birch-tree. This oasis in the

desert of conventional graves appealed to the aesthetic sense of Soames,

and he sat down there in the sunshine. Through those trembling gold

birch leaves he gazed out at London, and yielded to the waves of

memory. He thought of Irene in Montpellier Square, when her hair was

rusty-golden and her white shoulders his--Irene, the prize of his

love-passion, resistant to his ownership. He saw Bosinney's body lying

in that white mortuary, and Irene sitting on the sofa looking at space

with the eyes of a dying bird. Again he thought of her by the little

green Niobe in the Bois de Boulogne, once more rejecting him. His fancy

took him on beside his drifting river on the November day when Fleur

was to be born, took him to the dead leaves floating on the green-tinged

water and the snake-headed weed for ever swaying and nosing, sinuous,

blind, tethered. And on again to the window opened to the cold starry

night above Hyde Park, with his father lying dead. His fancy darted

to that picture of "the future town," to that boy's and Fleur's first

meeting; to the bluish trail of Prosper Profond's cigar, and Fleur in

the window pointing down to where the fellow prowled. To the sight of

Irene and that dead fellow sitting side by side in the stand at Lord's.

To her and that boy at Robin Hill. To the sofa, where Fleur lay crushed

up in the corner; to her lips pressed into his cheek, and her farewell

"Daddy." And suddenly he saw again Irene's grey-gloved hand waving its

last gesture of release.

He sat there a long time dreaming his career, faithful to the scut of

his possessive instinct, warming himself even with its failures.

"To Let"--the Forsyte age and way of life, when a man owned his soul,

his investments, and his woman, without check or question. And now the

State had, or would have, his investments, his woman had herself, and

God knew who had his soul. "To Let"--that sane and simple creed!

The waters of change were foaming in, carrying the promise of new forms

only when their destructive flood should have passed its full. He sat

there, subconscious of them, but with his thoughts resolutely set on the

past--as a man might ride into a wild night with his face to the tail of

his galloping horse. Athwart the Victorian dykes the waters were

rolling on property, manners, and morals, on melody and the old forms of

art--waters bringing to his mouth a salt taste as of blood, lapping

to the foot of this Highgate Hill where Victorianism lay buried. And

sitting there, high up on its most individual spot, Soames--like a

figure of Investment--refused their restless sounds. Instinctively he

would not fight them--there was in him too much primeval wisdom, of Man

the possessive animal. They would quiet down when they had fulfilled

their tidal fever of dispossessing and destroying; when the creations

and the properties of others were sufficiently broken and defected--they

would lapse and ebb, and fresh forms would rise based on an instinct

older than the fever of change--the instinct of Home.

"Je m'en fiche," said Prosper Profond. Soames did not say "Je m'en

fiche"--it was French, and the fellow was a thorn in his side--but deep

down he knew that change was only the interval of death between two

forms of life, destruction necessary to make room for fresher property.

What though the board was up, and cosiness to let?--some one would come

along and take it again some day.

And only one thing really troubled him, sitting there--the melancholy

craving in his heart--because the sun was like enchantment on his face

and on the clouds and on the golden birch leaves, and the wind's rustle

was so gentle, and the yewtree green so dark, and the sickle of a moon

pale in the sky.

He might wish and wish and never get it--the beauty and the loving in

the world!