



Henry
Williamson
—
The Phoenix
Generation

Faber Finds

ff

HENRY WILLIAMSON

THE PHOENIX
GENERATION

ff
faber and faber

‘Thou knowst how drie a Cinder this worlde is
That ’tis in vaine to dew or mollifie
It with thy tears, or sweat, or blood’

John Donne

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Part One

FELICITY

Chapter 1

‘FARM BOY’

The guests were still arriving, to judge by the crowd waiting on the pavement outside the Oxford Street shop. The two young men, sitting in a black sport's car with fabric body, drawn up by the kerb across the street, watched for a while. The upper part of the building was illuminated. "Bogus," said Piers. "Look at that 'ornate Ionic' pillar. I wonder they didn't put Mickey Mouse on them as well."

But Phillip was thinking of the safety of his new possession, his Silver Eagle, a six-cylinder, three-carburettor sports car. "Perhaps it would be safer to park down a side-street, in case someone pinches it."

Piers thought that his friend had paid far too much for that second-hand car. It was less than a year old, but the exhaust smoked blue, the engine used a gallon of oil every hundred miles. Obviously the previous owner had caned it. Phillip had employed the Motor Association to vet it before buying. The engineer's report had been equivocal: *Provided the excessive smoking can be abated it is in good order.*

"Have you insured it against theft?"

"Oh yes!"

Piers thought that the sooner it was stolen the better. He said, "It should be fairly safe here, don't you think?"

Having removed black-leather flying coats and helmets, the two friends walked bare-headed towards the American-style department store, said to be the only one of its kind in London. Not quite the place, Phillip had understood from Piers, where one would buy one's shirts, ties, and socks. Piers had taken him to his shirtmaker in Burlington Arcade.

It was a fine night in May, 1929. Stars shone above the roofs of London. The sky had a tawny glow. As they re-entered Oxford Street a large yellow limousine drew up outside the flood-lit building. The commissionaire, a tall ex-Guardsman wearing the Victoria Cross on his uniform greatcoat, walked down to the kerb to open the door. The principal guest was to be the Earl of Lonsdale. The yellow Rolls-Royce of the famous sporting peer was known everywhere. But instead of the expected figure with large red side-whiskered face from which jutted what gossip-columnists called the inevitable cigar, a small dark man wearing opera hat and cloak alighted and, after giving the commissionaire a tip, walked alone to the entrance. Some laughter greeted this odd figure.

"Dikran Michaelis, Piers. He bought one of Lord Lonsdale's old buses. I had a lift in it once. It was rather like his books."

Piers thought it strange that one who could write so well himself should be taken in by such bogus stuff. Phillip was very nearly two distinct people in one body: a strange mixture. In his talk he was penetrating and amusing about some of his past encounters with women; but when Piers read what he had written about essentially the same episodes, the wit and penetration was absent. The trouble with Phillip was that he still idealised girls, who were either sexual bitches or sentimental leeches. That girl Felicity was no good for Phillip. She made him irritable and moody, but he would stick to her. It was the same with the Silver Eagle: it gave continuous trouble, but he wouldn't get rid of it.

They were taken up in the lift, shown the way to a large room leading through to an entire floor and announced.

“Sir Piers Tofield! Captain Phillip Maddison!” as they went forward to Mr. Gordon Selfridge and their hostess.

Stringed music from one of five bands present was audible through the massed chatter. It was nearing midnight. “Let’s find the champagne bucket,” said Piers. “Ah, that’s better. Prosit!” Glass in hand, Phillip looked around. Many of the younger men wore red carnations in button-holes. He recognised Sylvester Card, once an almost unknown member of the Parnassus Club of young writers who had met, just after the war, once a week in a small room in Long Acre to discuss Literature and Life. Card was now famous as a writer of witty comedies and revues. Phillip felt they had nothing in common. Sylvester Card collected all the urban moods of the moment.

He saw, with a mild shock, the bearded face of Tenby Jones, ‘the lion of Chelsea’, who had been painting in the ruins of Albert when he had been wheeled past on a stretcher on July the First. That moment belonged to the past which must not be thought of until the time came when it could be written. He glowed within; then suffered with the thought that time was passing; and nothing done.

A woman with a smooth face recognised Piers. She wore a pink frock frothy with chiffon. Her necklace lanced sapphire and richer-than-rose-red rays.

“Julia, may I present Phillip Maddison. Lady Abeline.”

Another mild shock. Would Lady Abeline recognise him as the patient in the Royal Tennis ward at Husborne Abbey whom she had taken for walks in the park in May 1918, when he had been temporarily blinded by mustard gas? ... he lived again in scenes of the Western Front, stricken and accompanied by that sudden piercing awareness of mortality whence come images of paradise, clearness, realm of all beauty, poetry, art.

“Lady Abeline, w-we met at Husborne——”

She smiled with total confidence, showing splendid teeth. “Yes, you discovered a hawk-cuckoo, didn’t you? Uncle Bohun has never let me forget it,” she said gaily. Then to Piers, “How is Virginia? You must bring her to the Yacht Club. Of *course* it doesn’t matter about the divorce. My dear, one *never* heeds the old women, who have nothing better to do than talk. ‘Yes, my dear, have you heard my dear?’ Of *course* you must bring Virginia to see us.”

They made their way to the buffet. “Champagne, no thank you. Never touch it.” She lit a cigarette. Then winsomely, “A pink gin, thank you so much,” throwing a swift smile with Sirius flashings below the tall neck. Phillip, swallowing more champagne, began to feel that the whole scene was one of grace and light.

The string orchestra sank to silence. People were turning to a screen being crossed by letters and figures. From loudspeakers came the voice of the Controller of the B.B.C.

“Labour gain.”

“Oh lor’,” said Lady Abeline. “I did the horoscope of Ramsay Mac. and knew this would happen. And *what* a doleful voice.”

“The wreathing voice,” said Piers. “Why doesn’t he leave it to John Snagge.”

A tall man with a grey moustache and an assumed easy manner sauntered up. Standing upright, he bobbed his head before Lady Abeline. After greetings Piers said, “May I introduce Phillip Maddison? He’s a neighbour of mine and has just given up farming.”

“Ah,” said the elderly man. “Never forget what O. Henry said, ‘Once a farmer, always a sucker’.”

The affable and bewhiskered figure of Lord Lonsdale approached with a debonair, lightly-stepping man whose nose was slightly flattened. The four standing there appeared not to notice the celebrities, but all had observed them with the slightest of eye-movements. Phillip felt elation. He was among the great ones. Georges Carpentier, boxing champion of Europe ... 1914, friends on the Hillier

warblings in the summer twilight, such happiness of life going on for ever and ever ... until the strange and exciting suspension of life at the beginning of August.

*

The night glass-bubbled away and became early morning with a slight air of dishevelment. The screen continued to throw on election results. The monotonous voice of Sir John Reith—*Labour gain*. There was gentle booing in the vast crowded space: counter-cheers of the intelligentsia led by Sylvester Card, the actor-play-wright with a red carnation in his button-hole. Phillip felt like cheering too: everywhere the Tory landslide. Thank God. No more hard-faced war-profiteers becoming knighted baronets, and peers giving millions of pounds for Lloyd George's 'honours fund', while denying the workless ex-soldiers who had broken the Hindenburg Line and now were breaking their hearts on the dole.

*

He moved about in the crowd, happy with thoughts of one day writing this very scene. There was a kangaroo in a boxing ring with a young man. Most amusing. The animal gave a sudden kick at the bottom of the young man in boxing gloves as he tried to get away over the ropes. He fell. The kangaroo hopped over him, and stopped, appearing to stare at Dikran Michaelis standing alone with his back against a pillar: dark wavy hair, sharp Armenian-Jewish face cast in reflective melancholy. He said to Phillip, "It must be a French kangaroo, ignorant of the Marquess of Queensberry rules."

Phillip laughed. "My name is Maddison."

"I remember your face of Christ crucified. You are now famous, God help you."

"Not so famous as you are."

"A brief candle which guttered. From gutter to gutter, one might say."

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Michaelis."

The Armenian novelist looked even more depressed after a man and a woman had come up to say "Dicky darling, how *wonderful* to see you again", and passed on.

"They don't really mean it."

More people came up. Obviously Michaelis was popular. Why could he not believe it? Even an affectionate greeting appeared to leave him more melancholy.

"These English ladies and gentlemen carry good manners beyond the point of insincerity," said Maddison.

Phillip thought Michaelis must be unhappy because he, too, was cursed by a misplaced sense of time: occluded by shadow from childhood. He remembered that Armenians had been massacred by the Turks. Dikran was rootless. A blank feeling overcame him. What if his own work ceased to be the mainspring of living? The work that he was not doing; feeling the presence of Lucy too much to struggle against in the dull valley life, the daily walk beside the brook to the Longpond. He must start his book on the trout.

A string band was playing *Tales from the Vienna Woods*. The music sank to a murmur as of leaves.

"Here is another result that has just come in——" the slow deep voice growled once more. "Labour gain——"

Phillip saw Piers beside a tall girl watching the screen. He went to them. Piers said, "You remember Gillian?"

"Yes indeed. We met at Colham market just about three years ago, when I bought my first cow."

"'Rosebud'! And those too, too sweet calves you bought because they were starving, poor mites and Rosebud had so much milk. Have you still got them?"

"I had to give up farming." The tone of his voice, with its hint of resignation, prevented her asking

further questions as he sat beside her, to receive the full look of her big brown eyes. She was drinking brandy and soda.

“How is Felicity? I haven’t seen her for ages. Didn’t she become your secretary?”

“Yes. Do you ever go to the ‘Game Pie’ now?”

“Not since it was taken over by ‘Ma’ Merrill. It’s become too, too bogus.”

“Ugh!” said Piers. “Sweet champagne at three guineas a bottle. Well, I’m going to take Gillian home. If I don’t see you here, I’ll see you at the flat. Here’s a latch-key.”

*

About two o’clock there was a movement towards the screen about to relay further election results. Applause announced another Labour gain: Lady Georgiana Birkin had won a Staffordshire constituency from a Conservative candidate, with a majority of nearly 8,000. This was followed by a second announcement that Mr. Hereward Birkin, her husband, had not only held the seat in Birmingham he had taken from the Conservatives during the previous election, but had increased his majority by over 3,000 votes. A roar went up from the crowd in the street outside to add to the cheering within. Phillip was standing beside Lady Abeline and heard her say to the grey moustached man beside her, “Pouff! Birkin goes round in an old motor, ‘Boy’, pretending to be the friend of the working man.”

“A damned buffoon,” replied the other as though genially. “I know his father. The young pup was born with a golden spoon in his mouth, but if he had his way there would not be one country house remaining in England. What?”

“It’s quite a problem, sir,” replied Phillip, thinking that he had been addressed.

“You’re the friend of Piers Tofield, aren’t you? You’re the farmer——”

Lady Abeline took this chance to get away. Left with the grey-haired man, Phillip said, “Well, you was a sort of farmer, sir.”

“Won’t you join me at the bar, and drink to the damnation of all politics? Allow me to introduce myself. Owing to the general decay of manners among the so-called post-war generation, you were not permitted to hear my name, which is Runnymede.”

“I remember Piers speaking of you, sir. He’s putting me up for the Yacht Club.”

“You must get ’im to bring you over to my place. The racin’ starts this month, so we shall meet again soon. And don’t call me ‘sir’.”

There was an euphoric glitter in the unfocus’d grey eyes that warned Phillip to keep his distance. Was it pederasty? To his alarm he heard Captain Runnymede asking for two large whiskies and soda. Whisky on top of champagne—fatal. But he finished the drink out of an uneasy politeness, and was wondering how he could get away when a woman’s screams followed by laughter amidst a scattering of figures revealed that the kangaroo had again hopped over the ropes of the boxing ring, and was loose among the gold lamé’d, chiffon’d, tulle’d, and boiled-shirted crowd. It stopped against no resistance as men and women stood still. Its keeper arrived with a small bunch of carrots and dangled them against its nose. The kangaroo held the carrots between paws clobbered by boxing gloves and munched away as the room began to swirl around Phillip, who made for the door and hurried away down some stairs. He must get to the darkness of the side-street where his sports-car was parked. He was going to shoot his bundle.

After an hour he recovered sufficiently to open the top of the tonneau cover and drive slowly west until he found the Uxbridge road to Acton Vale and so to Ealing Common. Felicity was spending the night alone in the house during her mother’s absence. She helped him into the bedroom and took off his shoes, while he sat shuddering on a chair.

“You’re icy cold. Oh, Phillip, I should have been with you, to look after you. Come into bed with me, darling, and I’ll warm you.”

She moulded herself against his body. Gradually he ceased to tremble, and turned to enter her. She lay still, suffering because he did not make love to her first; he never wanted to kiss her, or do more than fondle her breasts. She understood this from what he had told her about his childhood: a mother forbidden to ‘make him a nambypamby’ by comforting him when he cried: a father who had insisted that he sleep in a cot, and at one year old had taken away the part of an old silk petticoat his mother had given him as a comforter. Had this warped him, driven him into himself? Had he made love, even to his dead wife, Barley, whom she pictured in her mind as perfection? Oh, would Phillip never be entirely hers? He had turned away, he lay still. She remained quiescent beside him. After awhile he rolled over and, putting an arm around his own neck, settled to sleep.

For some time she lay without movement, hardly breathing. The muscles of her stomach became hard with frustration. When he was asleep she got out of bed and swallowed four aspirins.

*

Phillip arrived home by train the next day with Felicity, after sending a telegram to announce the arrival. Both had made new resolutions to make a success of this second attempt to work together: not to see one another before noon, when he would have finished the morning’s writing; not to ask nervous-foolish questions about office details while he was by the river, observing and taking notes. He must be clear to write at regular hours every day, and finish at certain times. The afternoon was free. After tea, until supper, he would write his war novel. Every morning he would write his book of the life of a trout. That was the programme.

On arrival at Skirr Farm, Lucy told him that Piers had telephoned and left a message.

“He asked if we’d care to go with him to the Yacht Club on Saturday, and dine afterwards with Captain Runnymede.”

“Well, Saturday is to be a whole holiday—relaxation—no writing. Can you leave the children with Felicity?”

“I didn’t know you were coming, so I told Piers that I’d have to look after them, as Mrs. Rigg has Saturday at home.” She hesitated. “Yes, I suppose I could leave them with Felicity.”

“No,” he said. “Not after last Christmas.”

Felicity had been left alone with the children on Christmas night, when he and Lucy had gone to the party. She had only recently arrived to work for him, and had told them she would be quite happy alone; but overcome by melancholy and finally despair, she had written a letter to her mother describing her loneliness, and in an unhappy attempt to prove her feelings for Phillip, had brought her mother’s reply to his writing room. He had glanced at it, but read no further after *My Darling Girl*. *How dreadful for you to be left all alone on Christmas night of all nights! I was most distressed to read your letter—*

“But she was new then, wasn’t she? Anyway, I’ll be quite happy to remain here. Why not take Felicity? Piers said he wanted two more to crew him.”

“She’s never sailed, and I don’t know much about that sort of racing yacht. I’ll go alone.”

“I wrote down the telephone number. Piers is not staying at his home, apparently, but at an hotel in the New Forest.”

“I’ll telephone now.”

He thought that Piers was with Virginia, his wife, and he kept back his surprise when another voice, which he recognized as Gillian’s, cut in and said, “Do bring Felicity. She’s such a pet. I haven’t seen her for simply ages.”

He imagined Gillian with an arm over Piers' shoulder until his friend's voice said, "Get off the line, you bitch. Are you there, Phillip? That girl's listening from the bedroom."

"How's that adorable Rosebud?" the voice continued. "And those too, too sweet calves?"

"Oh, they're quite happy together."

"Do come," continued the voice, liquid-sloppy with drink. "I do so want to see Felicity. She's a pet."

"Yes, come," Piers cut in.

"I haven't got a car, I'm afraid."

"What's happened to your Silver Eagle?"

"It's in London with the firm that sold it to me. As you know, I had it vetted, before buying, by the Motor Association Engineer. He said the engine would be all right if the excessive oil consumption was put right. The salesman said it probably needed the oil-flow adjusting. I bought it on the understanding that it would be.

"I'm pretty sure one of the cylinder bores is badly worn, by a loose gudgeon pin on the piston."

Piers, bored by these mechanical details, said:

"We'll pick you up."

He never touched a spanner. His Ulster 1½-litre Aston-Martin was serviced by a mechanic who had converted Mews stable near Piers' South Kensington flat.

"How long will it take us to get to the yacht club?"

"Forty minutes. I can take you and Felicity if you don't mind rather a tight fit. We must be there not later than four. The race starts about an hour before high water. Right, three o'clock tomorrow."

"Hold on, Piers. Lucy wants to say something to you. Oh, she says, will you come to lunch here?"

"Love to. One o'clock tomorrow, then."

"I like Piers," said Lucy.

Phillip warned Lucy not to mention Virginia when Piers arrived with Gillian. "One never knows about wives or girl-friends these days."

After luncheon they sat in the sunshine by the Longpond, and Phillip told them that he would have to look for another house to live in. The War Department was taking over the land, which his Uncle Hilary had sold, at midsummer.

"It will be hell with all the Tank Corps hutments going up. I'd like to be somewhere nearer the sea."

"Are you giving up Fawley?"

"Oh no. I've invited my parents to live there, in one of the flats. I shall perhaps let the other two."

"Officers' families," suggested Piers.

Trout were rising to the surface of the Longpond. A hatch of duns was drifting.

"The trouble is, to write my book about a trout I must be near water. And when the army comes this brook will be poached to death."

It was time to leave for the coast. Piers' car had two bucket seats only.

"Would you care to drive? Gillian and I can sit on the hood."

Phillip, feeling this to be a courtesy offer only, replied that he was looking forward to seeing the view from the back. So Felicity sat in front beside Piers, and Gillian got up behind the driver, fitting her right foot with difficulty in the narrow space beside Piers' seat. Her left leg was bent back to be supported upon, while she supported her body with spread fingers. It was a precarious position, and higher than the top of the windscreen. When Phillip tried to adjust himself beside her there was no room for his legs, so Felicity took off his shoes and tucked a foot under each of her arms. She felt her warm

flowing into them as she hugged them to her body. Darling Phillip.

Lighting a cigarette, Gillian said, "Piers, you won't blind, will you? I'm hanging on literally by my fingernails."

With a crackle of exhaust they were off, watched by the entire village, it seemed, at cottage thresholds. Piers drove slowly at first, until the two perching behind said that they were all right; but he never exceeded 35 m.p.h. He slowed up and changed down well before corners, so that brakes were not needed. The wind blew Gillian's hair about her eyes, she laughed at Phillip and shook it out, while he supported her with an arm behind her woolly coat, feeling the warmth of her thigh pressed against his own.

"Very matey, isn't it?" she said to Felicity. "Are you most frightfully tired, holding us down, darling?"

"Oh no."

"It's too, too heavenly up here, Piers. One can see over the hedges."

The car swerved to avoid a bicyclist. She clutched Phillip, and laughed. "Do you mind if I put my arm round you?" holding her face close to his, while her hair tickled his forehead. "Aow, now I want a scratch."

He tried to work the loose strand under her Norwegian ski-ing cap, conscious of what Felicity was feeling as she sat with the hug of his legs relaxed. They drove beside a river.

"Piers, may we stop a moment?"

The car drew in under an avenue of lime trees. Phillip climbed the tarred railings, and was in the park. He strode to the bank. Water flowed glass-clear. Bines of crowfoot lifted and swayed in the current, their white flowers sometimes drowning but to reappear. Beyond, among trees, was the low thatched roof of a house. He went on to look at it, leaving the others leaning over the railings.

In the garden of the thatched house an elderly man and a woman were playing croquet. Both wore faded panama hats. He determined to return, when he had his Silver Eagle, and explore this country.

Before they went on, he asked a villager who lived in the house: to be told 'twas the Colonel and Mrs. Gott, and they was leavin' come Michaelmas.

"Do they own it, d'you know?"

"'Tes the Lord's. 'Twas once the steward's house, but 'a ban't livin' there no more."

"I suppose you don't know if it's to be let?"

"Us ban't heard nothin', sir. But then us doan't hear nought about the gentry's goins-on."

"Who's the owner?"

"'Tes the Lord's, zur."

Phillip went back to the others with this information. Piers said, "It belongs to George Abeline."

Before they went on Gillian insisted on changing places with Felicity. "The view is too, too wonderful darling."

So Felicity sat beside Phillip, who put an arm round her waist.

"Are you happy, Felicity?" he whispered.

"Oh yes! I love the wind on my face."

From their perch they saw masts and rigging as they drew nearer the port. Hulls of yachts, tarred schooners, and small coastal steamers were moored at the quay. Beyond was a row of white Georgian houses, one with pillars which was the Customs House.

They stopped farther down the quay. There was a view of sea and distant trees across a broad bay. Nearer, a low green-painted house was set back behind a stone wall. A flagpole was visible. They entered by an iron gate into a garden, where elderly men and women in blue jackets and yachting caps

were sitting at tables having tea.

“There’s ‘Boy’ Runnymede,” said Piers.

Captain Runnymede sat at a table by himself. He held a large tumbler of whisky and soda in one hand. Two trays stood on the table. One covered by a white cloth held teapot and cup, a plate of rolled bread-and-butter and another of cakes. Beside it was a silver tray with decanter and syphon of soda. The handsome face held a slightly mocking look as it regarded the newcomers. Then the pepper-and-salt suited figure, wearing brown-and-white golfing shoes, half-rose to say to Piers, “How are you, m’dear fellow? Glad you could get here in time for the race.”

Captain Runnymede, seated once more, with a half-careless wave of a hand indicated the empty chairs around his table. Then beckoning a young waiter in a white jacket he said, “Jerry, take this stuff away and bring some tea for my guests,” after which he drained his tumbler and put it on the silver tray. “And give me a whisky-and-soda. Piers, have a drink?”

“Not for the moment, thanks. I must see about my boat, if you’ll forgive me.” Gillian went with him.

“Will you have a drink, Maddison?”

“Not at the moment, thanks.”

The young waiter filled the tumbler, placed it within reach of his master, and took away the tea tray.

“We met at the Election party the other night, Captain Runnymede.”

“So we did. You are a farmer,” replied the other man, with an air of amused scorn as he looked about him. “Are you sailing?” he said to Felicity.

“Oh no, Captain Runnymede.”

“Then perhaps you’ll be so good as to pour out tea for me when it comes.”

Piers returned to ask Phillip if he would crew him, as someone had telephoned to say that his car had broken down on the way.

The breeze was stiffening with the tide; it might mean sickness; at the same time, to be left with Runnymede, who looked to be the sort of man who drank to escape the depression of a false nature, might be worse. While he hesitated an unexpected report shattered the air. From behind a tamarisk bush the lanyard of a small cannon standing with two others on the sea-wall, had been pulled by the steward.

Seeing the hesitation on Phillip’s face Piers said, “That’s the fifteen-minute gun. Come with me to my locker. I’ll see if I can fit you out,” and in the dressing room he said, “If you don’t want to go, I’ll take Gillian, she has crewed before. Only I thought you might be stuck with Runnymede.”

Phillip remained away from the table while Piers and Gillian went to change. Two boatloads of men and women were being rowed to the yachts at their moorings. The 10-minute gun had gone when the two returned, dressed alike in blue jerseys, serge trousers, peaked caps, and carrying oilskins and kapok life-belts. Phillip saw them into a praam below the slip, and watched them while they boarded their yacht, to set about hauling up main and foresail. Last to be run up was a little triangular flag to the top of the mast.

Returning to the garden, he saw the steward, in a white jacket, hoisting a duplicate of Piers’ flag.

“Isn’t it good to think that flags are still used for signalling, as in Nelson’s day, Felicity?”

“Yes.”

“Piers’ has just been run up.”

Captain Runnymede said heavily, “We call it a burgee.”

A broad man in white flannel trousers and double-breasted blue jacket with brass buttons, wearing

a large cap with a white cover, appeared. He had a gold watch in his hand. The last of the yachts were running up burgees. Sunlight flickered off the waves.

“According to Piers,” went on Runnymede, “You are a farmer——”

“I was learning to be one, Captain Runnymede.”

“I was about to say that, before you come to the inevitable end of a farmer, like Stephen Leacock—who, no doubt you will remember, in a good year, managed to get his seed back—and resume the pe——may I offer you a drink? Jerry, give Mr. Maddison a whisky and soda.” He nodded to himself several times, and turned to Felicity, who was pouring out tea. “You have read O. Henry, of course. It was O. Henry who said, ‘Once a farmer, always a sucker.’ Oh, I beg your pardon. What will you drink?”

Phillip gave her a look as much as to say, Beware—this man is an alcoholic. Felicity replied, “I love some whisky, if I may, Captain Runnymede.”

“Good girl.”

The Commodore was staring at the gold hunter watch open on the palm of his left hand. His right arm was raised. The steward, lanyard wrapped round fingers, was watching him. Down went the arm. The steward’s tug on lanyard, *bang!* the echo rolled.

“I think I’ll watch the start,” said Phillip, getting up to go to the quay.

A strong tide was flooding the harbour. The waves had little white tops. Yachts were sailing to and fro, each with its burgee fluttering taut in the wind. Some boats were heeling over as they tacked across the tide. Others were beating up against wind and water, close-hauled. It appeared to be a matter of getting as near as practicable to the starting line, marked by two buoys, before the starting gun. He had observed the synchronising of the captains’ watches with that of the Commodore’s before the crews had gone out to the boats.

A man watching told him that any boat that crossed the line before the starting gun would be notified by the running up of its burgee on the flagpole, to recall it.

Feeling mean that he had left Felicity alone to cope with Runnymede he returned to her saying, “Would you like to see the start? We’ll be back, Captain Runnymede.”

The other man waved a hand. They went to the wall and stood near a telescope on a tripod pointing to the starting line.

“Why did you have that whisky? He’s only trying to make you tight.”

“I rather like him,” she replied gaily.

“What were you talking about?”

“Oh, he has heard that the Swannery is likely to become an R.A.F. bombing range, so he is now going to renew the lease of his country house, but move to a cottage he’s bought somewhere on the East Coast, where he wants to paint in water-colour. He said I must go and stay with him when he has had the place done up.”

“He’s a ram in wolf’s clothing, as Dikran Michaelis would say.”

“He’s a dear.”

“A father-figure.”

The steward, now in blue jacket with Naval ribbons and small peaked cap under white cover, held the lanyard of the red cannon. His eyes were on the Commodore, who was crouching with an eye against the telescope fixed to the flagpole. Most of the boats were now criss-crossing near the starting line. Some were lagging, sheets at right angles to let slip the wind, while bows pointed on course.

The Commodore began to count.

“Five seconds—four—three—” he raised a hand—“two—one—”

BANG!

One of the boats had crossed the line prematurely. Another gun spoke: up went a burgee to the top of the flagpost. The yacht turned stern to breeze, its boom lifting over with the flapping sail which the helmsman hauled in to lessen the weight of wind as the boom was hurled over. The boat appeared to stagger before it recovered and went fast with the tide until put about; to hang in the wind before plunging after the other boats.

There followed, for Phillip, a tedious time with Captain Runnymede. He had to accept a drink since he felt it was expected of him. Then someone mentioned that there was table tennis in the new room. Here he passed an hour with Felicity, playing with his left hand since she was a beginner. While they were sitting down, resting, looking at yachting magazines, the steward came in and said that Captain Runnymede had left a message that he would be most grateful if they would go over to the Castle that night to help him entertain some old ladies to dinner. Sir Piers Tofield and Miss Templecombe had accepted. The Captain would send his motor to fetch them at eight o'clock, but they were not to hurry, as dinner was at half-past nine.

"I wonder if he thinks we're married?"

"Darling, of course he knows I am your girl friend."

"Then he'll expect us to sleep together."

She said happily, "Good. I must telephone Lucy that we won't be back to supper."

"I wonder why he invited you to stay with him at his cottage? I bet he's a sensual old devil."

"Most of 'Boy's' friends are painters, dancers, and writers."

"You seem on familiar terms with him already."

"He asked me to call him 'Boy'."

"He doesn't look the artistic type."

"Perhaps he enjoys their company. Everyone isn't sexy, you know."

"So I'm 'sexy', am I? I thought I didn't come up to expectations."

"Darling, I love you."

"I thought it a bit *outré* when he repeated that bit about O. Henry. He said the same thing to me at the party on Election night."

After the race, the crews crowded the bar before changing. There was loud talk about points in the race. Phillip began to feel that this was the life. Piers had already put him up for membership. His feeling of a social life, in the belief that a writer to be any good must keep apart and live in his own world, was temporarily abated. All was experience! He took his fifth whisky and soda from Piers.

"I rather fancy there will be quite a crowd later on tonight, coming down from London with Stefania Rozwitz, his girl friend."

"Isn't she one of the Russian ballet?"

"Yes. Runnymede has the whole company down sometimes, by special train to Bournemouth which gets in about half-past twelve."

"Is that where he lives?"

"His place is west of where we are now, about twenty miles. The Aston usually does it in under the half-hour from here."

"What time d'you think the party will end?"

"Oh, sometime tomorrow."

It was getting on for nine o'clock.

"Have you telephoned Lucy yet, Felicity?"

"Oh dear, I'd quite forgotten——"

He pushed past her to the box. Lucy said it was kind of him to have rung up. Billy and Peter were happily asleep in the same bed, everything was all right, and she would expect them when she saw them. When he came back to the bar he saw that Felicity was biting her nails. They were bitten down to the quick. It annoyed him to see them.

*

They arrived at the Castle soon after ten o'clock. Runnymede saw them briefly, apologised for having to leave them to write letters, and asked Piers to do the honours. After dinner the four went to the billiard room and played slosh. At one corner of the room was an oak door beyond which were stone steps leading down to the cellars—cave after cave lined with bottles. There was no dampness down there, the floors and walls having been rendered with a special kind of waterproof cement, Piers explained.

“He took the Castle on lease after the war. I’ve no idea where he comes from. I don’t think anyone knows, except that he had an American mother who left him a fortune. He told me once that he was with the sixteenth cavalry at Mons, and then went on the staff. What else he did in the war, anything, I don’t know.”

“I tried to talk to him about it at the club, Piers, but all he said was, ‘Who wants to talk about the goddam war?’”

It was midnight. Champagne suspended time. They sat with backs against the wall, glasses in hand. When Runnymede reappeared he was wearing a claret-coloured smoking jacket. “Let us await our guests in the hall,” he said.

A light flashed at the top of the flagpost on the lawn beyond the entrance drive, announcing the convoy passing under the arch of the eastern lodge. At once lights went on in all the rooms and the great oak door, iron-bound and studded, was opened. Two footmen stood by this door, while a red light glowed below the light on the pole. The chamberlain, wearing some sort of brocaded eighteenth-century coat with black silk knee-breeches and silver-buckled shoes, went forward as the tyres of the first motor stopped on the gravel. It was like a film set, Philip thought: the chamberlain bowed, came the guests, led by Stefania Rozwitz dressed in a pale fur toque and coat, gliding toward Runnymede with arms held out, a dozen young women behind her moving with level movements as though the bodies floated on air. Curtsies were dropped while the ballerina received clasps from the beaming host. The men stood behind them with less assurance, automatically feeling themselves to be in a supporting role.

Last of all, velour hat in hand, came a figure with a moon-face and the eyes of a children’s-book owl in spectacles.

“I say, Piers, do introduce me to our host, won’t you? I heard you were going to be here. Hull Phil. What a pleasure to see you again. And Gillian, my dear, I *am* delighted.”

“And what might be your connexion with the ballet, Mr. Plugge?” asked Runnymede, when Piers had introduced him.

“Oh, I hire out the chairs to the gallery boys and gels, sir.”

Archie Plugge was soon at home. He praised the ‘simply marvellous’ dancing of the ballet as he held a large whisky and soda beside Runnymede.

They moved into the banqueting hall. There were two enormous flaming hearths at each end. The loftiness below the roof was interrupted by a gallery running around three sides of the hall, up among dark beams and kingposts. On the floor of heavy oak planking stood a refectory table long enough to seat a hundred guests but now looking bare with a mere score or so of places laid amidst a profusion of flowers, candelabra, crystal glass, and gold plate.

“Seat yourselves anywhere,” cried Runnymede. “We don’t stand on ceremony here.”

~~Even so, the footmen served, the under-butler carved and sliced, the wine went round with dignity.~~ At last the servants left, with the exception of Jerry the valet, who had looked after his master at the Club-house.

“This is a party,” cried Runnymede, his eyes between glaze and glitter. He had eaten only oysters with whisky and soda. Along the table corks popped. Laughter was continuous.

Phillip sat with Archie Plugge, who explained that he was in partnership with a chap who hired out the collapsible chairs at sixpence a time to people in the queues for the ballet and opera.

“I’m still on *The Wireless Times*, old boy, the chairs are a sideline—literally so, ha-ha. It’s a good mine—fifty per cent pure profit on our outlay.” He went on to say that he had telephoned Piers’ home to propose himself for the week-end, but when he found he was not there he rang up Lucy, and since some of the ballet company were going to a party not far from Piers’ place, made enquiries and found they were on his doorstep, so to speak.

“Have you seen ‘Le Spectre de la Rose,’ Phil? I saw it for the first time tonight. It somehow reminded me of you. Rozwitz was marvellous.”

“Tell me about it, Archie.”

“It’s rather the same theme as ‘The Flying Dutchman’. A girl dreams of a lover in the rose she has been given, and her feeling calls up the vision in a material form.”

“Poor girl,” said Phillip, thinking of Felicity.

“I say,” whispered Plugge, confidentially, “What is our host, d’you know?”

“Retired cavalry. Rich American mother.”

Plugge raised his glass towards the head of the table, and then went for the lobster, with a sidelong glance at the chicken on his neighbour’s plate, mentally approving it for the second course.

Felicity sat on one side of Runnymede, Stefania on the other. ‘Boy’ appeared to live in a private world, served by Jerry and an almost colourless Scotch whisky. It was not so much a party, as an assembly of parties. Phillip tossed a roll which fell at the other end of the table, where sat the male dancers in a separate gathering, some talking with feminine voices and gestures. The roll was gracefully tossed back. The host then picked up another roll and hurled it at Phillip.

“Now then, ‘Farm Boy’,” he called out. “Come on, pay a dividend! You’re a writer. Amuse us. Remember what O. Henry said, ‘Once a farmer, always a sucker.’ You haven’t said a goddam word all the evening, Maddison. Tell us somethin’ amusin’.”

“What sort of thing amuses you, Captain Runnymede?”

“What does that mean exactly?”

“I haven’t quite got your wave-length, but I gather that you’re not a sucker.”

“What d’you mean by that?” asked Runnymede, in a voice suddenly quiet.

“Hush, ‘Boy,’ hush,” said Stefania putting a hand on the sleeve of his jacket.

“I meant merely that you’re apparently not a farmer yourself. Nor am I—it gave me up.”

Runnymede sat back, nodding his head to himself. “At any rate, my other friends don’t call me a sucker to my face, although they probably think it.”

“Oh no, ‘Boy’,” said Stefania. “Don’t pretend that you’re hurt. You were playing with Farm Boy, now Farm Boy is playing with you.”

“Very well. I can see I am in the way, so I’ll say goodnight all, and leave you to enjoy yourselves. He pushed back his chair and toppled over.

“I can tell you one thing,” said Piers, when ‘Boy’ was back in his chair. “I saw this farm boy once doing a very fine stroke of business in the market. Made a good profit, too, over Rosebud. She was

beautiful. What did she cost you, Phil? A tenner, wasn't it? Quick work, I must say, and worth every penny of it. Don't you agree, Gillian?"

"She was a pet. A love. She was simply too, too sweet," sang Gillian, and, draining her glass, she gave a loving glance at Runnymede across the table.

"You're a dark horse, Maddison," said Runnymede, smiling to himself. "Why didn't you bring Rosebud?"

"She was looking after two other suckers at the time."

"I don't get you. Who or what is this Rosebud?"

"An Ayrshire heifer I bought at market."

When the laughter had ended, Runnymede said, "Pay a dividend, and tell us more about the Rosebud."

"I bought two calves at market. They were starving. For all animals to be sent to market is traged Market Hill at Colham is a place haunted by lost love, anguish, and fear. So I bought a cow from a milkman, so bagged up, as they say, that——"

"A milkman bagged up, did you say? Or was he baggered up, possibly a euphemism for the familiar state of all farmers today?"

"In a way, yes. But it was the cow who was in pain. She hadn't been milked that morning, in order to show off the size of her bag."

He told them about the honest milkman, how Piers and Gillian waiting apart gave him a calmness to know that the cow was good, as was the milkman's word. It was all a true play of social instinct, he said, feeling foolish.

"God bless my soul," said Runnymede. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I suppose a ballet could be written around the incident—'The Honest Milkman'?" said Piers.

"Good God," said Runnymede, "And that's how you spend your time. You're a do-gooder, Maddison."

"You're a do-gooder, too. Look at your wonderful party."

Cheers and handclapping seemed to depress the host. Phillip knew what he was feeling: the loneliness of the would-be artist, the dream of happiness that was built on the broken inner self. The mockery, the touchiness, the semi-scoffing attitude toward others were but signs of inner despair. He felt affection for Runnymede.

"Are there any more animals on your goddam farm, Maddison?"

"I'm afraid not. I lost my land through my own stupidity. Ideas pass, the land remains."

This simple statement caused silence. He was conscious of sympathy from the feminine young men at the end of the table. They had been listening to the talk with absorbed interest. Then one of the number took a mouth-organ out of his pocket and began to play a melancholy tune, improvising as he went on, bringing in bass notes to represent the noises of market. Suddenly the tune lifted into life and another of the feminine young men got up and began to dance with hardly a sound of feet on the oak floor. Another joined him, throwing off his jacket, and another, until they were passing to and fro in the candlelit hall with a suggestion of the grace of swallows meeting and turning and circling over the lawn when the glass is falling and the gnats are flying low because of damp membranous wings. Phillip felt tears coming to his eyes as he sat, hands folded as though meekly on his diaphragm, with a feeling of being borne above life, aware of Stefania moving her feet out of her low-heeled shoes and floating down the other side of the table, giving him the passing glance of a dove among swallows. The other girls joined in. He felt the part-communicable truth of the moment: of Rosebud and her gentleness, her grief for her own lost calf, her love given to the two calves he had bought:

Runnymede, also aching under his bravura for lost love.

They were miming the story: Rosebud was being danced by Stefania, the Honest Milkman by male dancer, the calves by two girls. The others made the market-day crowd, all in silence, through motion: the flow of feeling transformed to movement.

Then everybody was clapping and laughing—except Runnymede, who sat at the head of the table leaning back a little in his chair, his manner of faint mockery that of a man wilfully apart, watching a surrealistic world of cubes and angles, Phillip dancing with Stefania.

As for Phillip, he felt himself to be moving on air while holding and being upheld by air.

*

The morning star had risen in the east when, feeling his way down a dark passage with feet and hands, a swirling vehicle of acidity remaining after two bottles of champagne, he was aware of Runnymede's voice, now petulant, now pleading, now angry, repeating the same words again and again—behind the closed door—*Beat me—beat me—Goddamit, why don't you beat me!*—ending the pleas with a crash. What was Runnymede doing?—his conscience demanding punishment?—and for what? God, how easy it was to lose one's true self ... and with a pulling movement of hands along the wall he counted to twenty-three before stopping, to proceed again with caution, until he found and overcame the obstacle, sought and found the glass handle of the 'throne'—a large glass knob cut with a score of facets. He had observed this potential bolt-hole, making a mental map-reference to it as they were, on the way down to dinner.

He turned the cut-glass knob; and after a timeless period of surgent repentance on his knees lifted the plug and left the hide, his bearings beyond tight-closed eyes fixed upon the length of the passage, particularly the step—*up* this time—now twenty paces on—slowly—

He tripped and fell over. The jolt upset everything—he must go back to the cut-glass handle—he was conscious of someone helping him up, leading him into candle-light. A voice was saying *Drink this*. Fizzy stuff. His legs were lifted and he was floating on a bed; but not, thank God, with saliva coming into his mouth for the dreaded return.

Later, he knew that his forehead was being sponged with cold water. The candlelight revealed an oval face enclosed in a white bathing turban. He felt better.

“Stefania, how very kind of you.”

“How do you feel, ‘Farm Boy?’”

“Better, thank you.”

She sat on the side of the bed and looked at him.

“Why do you men drink? I know what ‘Boy’ is looking for—his mother. But what are *you* looking for?”

“I don't drink much, as a rule.”

“But you are looking for something. Isn't Felicity enough, and your writing? You are sad about your farm. Why? Tell me. Do you know what it is? If so, tell me. Don't be afraid of me. I have known many men—I have known Nijinsky, yes, I still know Nijinsky. There was a contradiction in his life that overwhelmed him, just as there is in ‘Boy’, only a different contradiction. I try to help him. I try to help you. Tell me, ‘Farm Boy’.”

“All life is a search for ‘le spectre de la rose’.”

She looked at him again and said, “You are a poet, as well as a Farm Boy.”

“As a necromancer raises from the rose-ash, the ghost of the rose—I must raise *my* ‘spectre de la rose’—or die.”

“You will die in any case, ‘Farm Boy’. Who was she?”

“My first wife, who died at nineteen, having a child. The wrong way round. Feet first.”

“Did the child live?”

“Yes.”

“Where is the child now?”

“Lucy—my second wife—looks after him. She loves him more than I do. With a true, human love which I lack.”

“Go back to Lucy, and love your son, ‘Farm Boy’.”

She kissed him on the forehead, and he returned to Felicity’s room, got in beside her, and fell asleep.

Felicity lay in her bed, unmoving. She was thinking, or rather feeling, that she had lost Phillip. She had seen him returning along the passage, and entering the bedroom of the beautiful, the graceful Stefania Rozwitz, whom she adored. If only her mother had allowed her to train as a dancer, as she had wanted to when a child.

Chapter 2

FLUMEN MONACHORUM

Phillip went to London to make a complaint about the engine of his car. The Portland Street salesman was suavely repetitive.

“The Motor Association engineer’s report made it clear, surely, sir, that the oil-flow needed only a little adjustment. The regulating screw on the oil-pipe to the overhead valve tappets needed a turn or two, I thought I heard him say.”

“I fancy that is what *you* suggested.”

“Really, sir? But I’d not seen the car before, it only came in that morning. Have you tried adjusting the oil screw, sir?”

“Oh yes. There’s no compression in one of the cylinders. You can hear the air hissing past the piston when you turn the handle.”

“A broken ring, perhaps, sir. If you’d like us to take off the cylinder head for you, and can spare a couple of hours, I’ll get a mechanic to draw the piston.”

Phillip went back that afternoon. The front cylinder was badly scored. “The gudgeon pin apparently came adrift, sir. It looks like a rebore.”

“How much will a rebore cost?”

“We might do it for ten pounds. She’ll require new pistons, of course. Shall we say fifteen pounds for the job?”

“I suppose it wouldn’t be fair to ask you to pay for the entire job, since I bought the ’bus as it was. Caveat emptor, you know.”

“That’s very sporting of you, sir. I’ll tell you what, we’ll throw in the pistons. How about a tenner for the job, sir? By the look of the toe-mark on the floorboard by the accelerator pedal, the last owner caned your engine somewhat.”

When the work was done he drove home at thirty miles an hour. The dipstick showed clean oil, and none used. He must take Lucy for a drive, at once.

“You look after the house while we’re gone, Felicity. I’m going to take Lucy to look over the house at Flumen Monachorum we saw on the way to the Yacht Club last Saturday.”

Felicity felt unhappy because Phillip did not invite her to come, too. Had he forgotten what he had said to her? ‘We’ll go over together, and if the place is all right, I’ll take it, then well bring Lucy and let it be a surprise for her.’

Now she watched them driving away, and felt forlorn. He did not really love her. Was he in love with Stefania Rozwitz? Had he slept with her that night of the party?

*

“Lucy, d’ you think Mother will mind if we move some miles south of Fawley, now that they’re going to live there when Father retires?”

“Well, all Mother’s letters have been about how wonderful it will be for her to be so near the children.”

“But Skirr farmhouse is sold, as you know, with the rest of the estate, and we’ve got to give vacant possession by Michaelmas. And frankly, I don’t fancy living in one of the flats at Fawley, right on top of my parents.”

Lucy thought that this was perhaps not the time to tell Phillip that Mother had written to her, asking her if it were possible that she, Lucy, might take Doris' two little boys, so that Doris could go back to her old job of teaching in London, and spend her holidays in the country with them. Mother had said in her letter that, when she and Father came to live there, it might result in a reconciliation between Father and Doris, now that the marriage between Doris and Bob Willoughby had failed.

Lucy would love to have Doris' two little boys, it would be so good for Billy and Peter to have some cousins to play with. After all, Fawley was big enough, and there was plenty of garden, and the downs behind. But Phillip did not get on with either of his sisters, Elizabeth or Doris. So Lucy said nothing about the letter from his mother.

"I don't want to live at Fawley. The downs will be out of bounds, tanks churning up the turf. Instead of rooks cawing there'll be the crack of tank cannon, and splintered trees." He thought of Bourlon Wood in the battle for Cambrai in November 1917, and drove on slower than before.

"Didn't they say at the enquiry that there wouldn't be any firing this side of the downs, Pip?"

"Well, to be honest, it isn't altogether a question of tanks or a firing range. It's the fact that I've failed in what I undertook to do. As you know, Uncle Hilary bought back the family land my grandfather threw away, so that I could succeed him, and I—well—I threw it away, too. And I want to be near a trout stream, to watch fish, for my book. And I'd like to move nearer the sea, and I think I've found a house. It was to be a surprise, but I've told you before we get there. We're on the way now."

"How lovely!"

"It's got plenty of room," he went on with a stir of optimism, "and it's all by itself in a hamlet called Flumen Monachorum. There used to be monks in the Abbey, but Henry the Eighth dissolved them. Lord Abeline lives at the Abbey, he's the landlord."

Lucy blushed. Should she tell Phillip that George Abeline was her cousin, by marriage? No, it was not important.

The elderly tenants were only too pleased that someone had come to look at the house. Over to Colonel Gott said that he and his wife wanted to move nearer a town, the place was rather isolated for them, they had been thinking of going back to Cheltenham to be among friends. It was a jolly little place, he declared, not too difficult to run, and plenty of help was available in the hamlet. The bathing water was fed to a tank in the roof from a ram beside the river, and drinking water came from a well, as was usual in the district. They were shown round the bedrooms, five in all, and three living rooms in addition to kitchen and scullery. There were the usual outhouses, and drainage by septic tank.

"There's a couple of miles of fishin', the rent is moderate, forty pounds a year, tenant paying rate another twenty. The very place to study trout, if you want to write about them. I've read your book of the otter's wanderings with interest, knowing the Devon moorland country more or less. We took the place and the fishin' on a seven-year lease, two of which are yet to run. I'll speak to the Steward, if you like, and may I tell him that you're prepared to consider taking over the unexpired portion of the lease?"

"Thank you, Colonel Gott."

Lucy and Phillip went away happy at the prospect of living in such a secluded place. They drove into the town, and visited the Steward, a solicitor to whom Phillip made a formal application to take over the remainder of Colonel Gott's lease at Midsummer. For references he gave the name of Lucy's father, his uncle Sir Hilary Maddison, and his bank.

"I'll put your application before his Lordship, who will want to see you, Mr. Maddison."

The following week, wanting to run-in the rebored engine, he set off for London to break the news to his parents. He took Felicity with him, she was going to stay at home for awhile. He said he would

determined to begin the trout book, for which he had had the advance royalties more than a year ago. She had heard that before.

“I don’t see why I can’t do the book on the trout at the same time as the war book, once I get into routine. I’ll send a chapter of each to you every day, and not re-write one sentence. Then when I’m in full flow, you can come down. I mean, if you can live at home for awhile, you can also begin the novel you want to write, can’t you?”

She remained silent: she felt depression growing upon her: this was his way of telling her it was over. She tried not to cry. A little farther on he stopped beside a wood near Andover and said, “Come on.” She trembled: she prayed she would not fail him by remaining tense, so that he would turn away from her. They lay on dry leaves. She was thrilled, by his sudden fierceness, and hearing from him the ‘three little words’ of the current revue song, felt herself becoming tumescent with a feeling of love beyond desire; holding him in her arms she felt that the earth was rocking, while involuntary cries came from her. And afterwards as she lay beside him staring at the sky beyond the canopies of the trees she was lapped in happiness that now her dream of having a child before she was twenty-one might be fulfilled. If she became pregnant she would go away without telling him, so that he would never feel burdened by her ugly presence, and have her baby alone in a remote cottage somewhere.

They drove on to London in silence, and Phillip put her down by the underground station Hammersmith Broadway.

“Take care of yourself, dearest,” she said, hoping he would want to kiss her goodbye. But all he said was, “I’ll telephone you as soon as I know what I’m doing. I’m going to see my parents, who are coming to live at Fawley, then I’ll be at the Barbarian Club. Would you care to meet me there tonight?”

“Oh yes!”

*

Phillip felt guilty when he saw how much his mother was looking forward to a new life, as she called it, among her children’s little ones. Had Lucy spoken to him about having Doris’ two boys when she went back to teaching?

“Well, as you know, Mother, I don’t get on very well with either Doris or Elizabeth. Also—no please don’t be upset—Lucy and I may not be living at Rookhurst. You see,” he went on, speaking quietly to control a feeling of exasperation, “all the estate is sold, including Skirr Farm, so we’ve got to give up the farmhouse. Then the brook, and the Longpond, all belong to the Army authorities, and there’ll be officers fishing for trout there. So I must move, to be beside a stream, to observe fish before I can write about them. But we’ll be quite near.”

“Oh, I am so relieved, my dear son.”

How like a child she was, she had never really grown up——

“You see, Phillip, your father is a very lonely man, and looks forward to going for walks with you where he walked with his father when he was a boy. He talks about the walled garden, too, and how he will be able to grow fruit again, against the walls. Now tell me all about Lucy, and Billy, and little Peter and Rosamund——Oh, I cannot tell you how I am looking forward to seeing them all together and in that lovely country, Phillip. I am counting the days to next spring, when Father retires from the office! Oh, must you go so soon? Won’t you wait to see your father? He will be so disappointed. Yes, I’ll give him your love, my dear son. You are a good son to us, we can never thank you enough for inviting us both to live at Fawley.”

“Oh, Mother! You’re doing me a favour, by occupying part of it.”

*

An old soldier wearing the riband of the 1914 Star arrived on a bicycle one morning when Phillip was looking over the new house with Billy. He had a most woeful expression, as though he had found himself homeless after some years of fancied security. This indeed was the case.

“Sir, permission to speak to you. Rippingall, sir, at your service!”

Phillip knew the soldierly address. He liked it. He took the old fellow into the house. After a cup of tea, he decided that he was that rare thing, a gentle soul. Also he was of a literary turn of mind, having read Shakespeare, Tolstoi, and other classical writers.

Rippingall explained that he had been the gardener and house-parlourman to the old vicar of Flumen Monachorum, who had allowed for his occasional bouts of malaria; but the new vicar—“His Reverence bears the name of Scrimgeour, sir, I expect you know the gentleman, he comes from Liverpool, I believe”—had shown him no sympathy after one of his bouts, and had told him to go.

Rippingall had a pinched, bluish look about him, and was so earnest in offering himself for work of any kind that Phillip took him on, especially when he told him that he had been a mess-waiter in a regular regiment of foot, and had also worked as a house-parlourman since the war. He could cook, wash clothes, keep accounts, paint, do a bit of masoning, carpentry, “and what not”.

“Well, you’ve told me what you can do, so I won’t bother with what you can’t do.”

“I am a trained soldier, sir, a trained valet, house-parlourman, cook, gardener, and what not, sir.”

“Have you been in service other than the Rectory?”

“Sir, I was valet to Captain Runnymede for nine years,” replied Rippingall, giving him a salute while the smart raising of the right arm revealed a half-bottle of gin in the pocket of his threadbare tweed jacket.

“How often do you go on a blind, old soldier?”

“Only when those who are, in a manner of speaking, my betters, become more or less critical of me, sir,” and he gave Phillip another salute.

“How often is that?”

“About twice a year,” replied Rippingall, trying to click heels which were worn down.

Rippingall was such a success, the garden beginning to look so orderly, and Lucy so pleased, that Phillip wrote to Felicity, and asked her to come back. He was now, he said, sure that things would be different.

*

Billy had a passion for the tar-engine which was then working on the London road. It was a beautiful thing in his eyes, which shone whenever it was praised by his father when they passed it in the sports-car. But sometimes Phillip teased Billy about it, pointing out that it gave off an unpleasant smell, that it was sticky and never washed itself, that in fact it was a detestable if useful mass of congealed tar. This would enrage Billy, and his tea-things were liable to be pushed away, and a word shouted at his father that always displeased Lucy—“Bug off, Daddy, bug off.” Lucy would attempt to explain that Billy felt strongly about the tar-engine and that Phillip was upsetting him and also encouraging him to use silly words.

“He is being inoculated against such words,” Phillip said to Felicity.

At the tone of his father’s voice the child would show a confusion of feeling, as he glanced first at Lucy’s face, then not at his father’s but on the ground. He would pout, frown, go away by himself; and Lucy would return to her sewing, or her cleaning, or another of the duties which kept her working from early morning to late at night. Phillip would feel in himself something of the confusion of which the little boy was suffering, and return to his writing room, to potter about, doing anything but writing, waiting to bring himself clear and as it were into focus again. Was it not good that the boy should

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