

BOOTH TARKINGTON

THE  
*Show  
Piece*

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A story of the younger generation: the author's last novel—and one of his finest—which he was finishing at the time of his death.

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THE  
SHOW  
PIECE

INTRODUCTION BY  
SUSANAH TARKINGTON

1947

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FIRST EDITION

## Introduction

WHEN I tried to think whether or not my husband would wish this unfinished novel of his to be published, I could reach no decision; for only Divine Providence could possibly supply me with the answer. As I read and re-read *The Show Piece*, however, I began to be certain that the writing itself demanded publication. I saw, too, that in the most important way the book really had been finished; that it is all here for people who care about the essence of a book.

Mr. Tarkington had found occasion to dictate the synopsis of the ending as he saw it would be, and he had left a few dictated notes. The synopsis and the notes are included for the benefit of those who read in order to know “what finally happened,” which of course is important, too, and something that only a morbidly literary affectation would seek to ignore, since everything living must begin and develop, or fail to develop, and end. Yet in *The Show Piece*, as in most of Mr. Tarkington’s writings ever since *The Flirt*, the truth and the mystery of human nature, and how most clearly to tell about that truth and that mystery, have been his chief concern.

It seems to me appropriate—and I hope I am not wrong—to reprint here parts of an article that Mr. Tarkington wrote not much more than a year ago when he was asked to tell how and why he had written a book of his called *Image of Josephine*. In these few words Mr. Tarkington expressed to the full, I think, what he had come to consider his particular sort of business, so to speak, as a novelist. He wrote:

Since everything we do depends much upon what our ancestors have done for us, and to us, it must be true that any novel begins to be written before the writer is born. So if an author tried to explain completely how and why he has written a certain book he’d have to produce biographies of all the twigs on his family tree, followed by his own memoirs—to include the influence of environment—and in all the world there wouldn’t be patience enough to listen to him unless his mother were still alive.

Of course this means only that the quality of any book depends upon the kind of person the author is. Well, that’s something he doesn’t himself know, because no man knows himself and even the shrewdest women have but a sketchy notion of themselves and usually don’t like to expose it to too much light. . . .

If for some moments the reader will think hard of his circle of friends and acquaintances he’ll perceive that his thoughts are really roving among strangers. Their aspects and manners are familiar enough to him, of course, and he knows what many of them would do under given circumstances. Every one of them has his own special reputation, so to speak, and a few adjectives tell the color of it. One man is thought “kind and broad-minded”; another “cold and yet self-sacrificing,” and so on. Thus the reader may think of these people but might find that his wife differs from him in her opinion of some of them. . . .

In any book intended to investigate human beings and if possible to reveal something about them, the writer must take account of such matters. If the people in the book are to “come alive” to the eye and ear of an observant reader, those people must be not easier to know all about than actual people. They must be people about whom the reader could change his opinion, as he does, sometimes, of actual people; and his likes and dislikes may alter accordingly. The people of the book, to seem human, must be as inconsistent, for instance, as human beings are, and must inspire in one another as diverse opinions of themselves as all human beings do. That is, they mustn’t fall

into fiction patterns. What they feel, think, and do mustn't conform to the literary expectations of a reader more accommodatingly than do the actual creatures of flesh about him. The author, moreover, mustn't work the reader into liking or disliking any of the people of the book. Such processes are appropriate to the "vicarious adventure" and vicarious love-experience stories wherein the reader (probably the author, too) becomes in imagination one or more of the fictitious people and thus "escapes" from life and the cares of the day; but though almost any book, or almost any work of art, can possibly be used as "escape," the investigatory novel isn't meant that way. . . .

*The Show Piece*, though it is an entirely different sort of book from *Image of Josephine*, is certainly also an investigatory novel. While it is an exploration of egoism, and—as Mr. Tarkington said while he was writing it—might even have been called *The Egoist* if George Meredith hadn't used that title, it is much more than the revelation of "Irvie Pease's" unconscious and seemingly immutable self-centeredness. It deals also, in Mr. Tarkington's deceptively simple and uninvolved prose, with the strange attraction of egoism and the powerful and intricate effects that egoism may have upon a variety of lives other than that of its own peculiar victim, perhaps because we are egoists all, in one measure or another.

To me, however, and I think I dare be this personal, the deepest significance of the book, and what makes it a crown to his life as a man and as a writer, is the tremendous fact that his own center was not in self. Autobiographical as any creative human being's work necessarily in time must be seen to be, yet only the great can achieve something beyond "self-expression," can see from the outside as well as from the inside, and so be wise. Mr. Tarkington was wise, and so was truly modest; but it is not, I think, incumbent upon me to be modest for him.

SUSANAH TARKINGTON

# The Show Piece

# Chapter 1

THAT an able-minded man in his late forties could be made morally bilious by a dear innocent child of four or five, and that for years such a man, a family doctor, would return to that condition whenever he thought of that child, overtaxes credulity; but the thing has happened.

The older we grow the queerer we are—though it may be only that the older we grow the better we see how queer everybody is—but, even in the days of Irvie Pease’s infancy, Dr. Joseph Erb recognized the strangeness of his thoughts about the child. Later, old Erb began to perceive the even greater oddity of his going on, year after year, feeling the same way about Irvie—whom almost everybody else loved. Erb and I had gone into our fifties, though, before the doctor openly admitted to me the absurdity of his prejudice.

That afternoon, having prescribed a tonic and peevishly referred to my dislike of exercise, Erb sat down by one of the open windows of my workroom, lighted a bent cigarette and looked poisoned as a noisy young voice was heard from the front yard of the house next door. “At twenty or even thirty,” Erb said, “I wouldn’t have believed that at my present age I could be so irked by merely the voice of that fifteen-year-old child out there. How do you stand it, yourself?”

“Without fury,” I replied, not permitting myself to laugh. “It brings me no acute discomfort even though I come near living with it.”

“So you do,” he assented. “Why don’t you move away?”

At that, I did laugh. “Do you think Irvie Pease is the reason I’m such an old wreck that my sister calls you in to prescribe bitter syrups for me and threaten me with death if I don’t walk five miles a day?”

“I didn’t say anything about five miles,” he said. “You can push yourself around a few blocks at the end of an afternoon’s work, can’t you? You’d better—if you expect to finish this book you’re on!” His annoyance with me increased as the voice outdoors became noisier. “Stop making a fuss over a twenty minutes’ walk a day. Confound it, listen to that boy out there!”

“Why should we, Doctor?”

“Because we can’t help it! Not with that window open.”

“Look at me, Lucy!” the boy was shouting. “Watch me, Edgar! Look, all you kids! Everybody listen to me, the Old Maestro!”

Dr. Erb knew as well as I did that many people found this gay young voice anything but an unpleasant one; nevertheless he gave me a malign glance, and then, urged by the human perversity that draws the eye to what will afflict it, he stared down from the

window into the broad front yard next door. So did I.

There was a stone sun-dial in the midst of the green lawn and upon it a youth in grey flannels had clambered to stand erect, inviting the attention of five or six contemporaries previously engaged in the chase of a pair of frolicsome cocker spaniels. The boy on the sun-dial was brown-haired, brown-eyed, tall for his age but comely and not cumbersome. Indeed he was so elaborately graceful that the strong suspicion of his being consciously so was readable in Dr. Erb's crinkled expression.

"Hey!" the boy shouted. "Everybody shut up! Forget those tykes, stand still, look at me and listen! Me, the good Old Maestro's giving you a recitativo. Anybody that laughs is fined five dollars!" Then, as the group of his young friends subdued themselves to watch and listen, he assumed a mock heroic attitude, one arm extended and the other upon his heart. "I'm a statue on a pedestal, see. Statue of an Orator in the Forum Romanorum."

One of the boys made an objection. "You can't be, Irving. Statues can't talk."

"This one can," the youth on the sun-dial said, and improvised loudly. "Friends, Romans and Countrymen, lend me your great big stick-out ears! I come not to bury Caesar or anything but to praise him if I can think why. Black as the pitch from pole to pole, I am the captain of my fate, I am the master of my soul! Kindly cheer, everybody; cheers, please! Louder, please; anybody that doesn't cheer loud as they can I'll fine ten dollars."

A smaller boy seated on the turf before him spoke up seriously. It was he who had objected to a statue's talking. "You can't, Irvie. Nobody here's ever had ten dollars all at once in their whole lifetime."

"Shut up, Edgar." Irvie Pease stood on his left foot, waved his right leg and both arms. "Look! The Russian Ballet! Watch the Old Maestro perform a Russian Ballet on but a few square inches of sun-dial. I'm the Afternoon of a Faun, see. More cheers, please! Anybody that doesn't cheer loud enough I'll fine twenty dollars. Yay! Hurray for the Old Maestro doing the Russian Ballet!"

Then, singing "Too-da-looodle-doo" as his accompaniment, he did the Russian Ballet a little too much, fell from the sun-dial, came to ground on his hands and knees, laughing, and jumped up lightly. "What do I do next? I'll tell you. The Old Maestro will now play an exhibition game of tennis. Hop around to the tennis court, everybody. The Old Maestro's going to play an exhibition set of singles. Emma, I'll let you be my ingloriously defeated opponent. The rest of you can be frenzied spectators. Follow the Old Maestro! Yay!"

Musically protracting his "Yay", he ran round the house to the tennis court in the shrubberied wide back yard. He ran leapingly, the spirit of the ballet still upon him; and with a submissive kind of eagerness the half-dozen others followed him—all except one, the boy Edgar, who remained seated upon the ground near the sun-dial and appeared to be lost in thought. Young Emma, my niece, royally appointed to be Irvie Pease's tennis opponent, ran almost as dancingly as he did.

"Tickled to death, isn't she?" old Joe Erb said, as the sound of the young voices came to us more faintly. "They all think it's a privilege to have Irvie Pease take a little notice of 'em. Of the whole kit-and-boodle of 'em, that young niece of yours is the most so. Ever think about that?"

“Yes, I’ve seemed to notice it.”

“I’ll bet you have! She and the rest of the kids aren’t much foolisher over him than the grown people around here are, though. Actual adults brighten all up if he condescends to jolly ’em a little. They’re always saying, ‘Hasn’t he the loveliest manners with older people?’ Manners? Just pure, bald patronizing!”

“Or just pure, bald youngness,” I suggested. “Amiable of him, too, because most of ’em at his age don’t waste their time noticing us at all.”

“Me,” Erb said, “I like that better than the patronizing. As for that young niece of yours, she’d consider it a big treat to be allowed to polish his shoes. I’ve seen her a dozen times helping everybody else spoil him, hanging on his every golden word. If you’re so fond of her, as they tell me you are, why’n’t you get her to laugh at him, instead?”

I laughed, myself, as I resumed my chair at my work-table; I’d risen to look out of the window. “‘Get her to laugh at him’? She does that all the time. It’s the chief item of Irvie’s spell. She’s always telling me what a ‘marvelous comedian’ he is.”

“I see,” Erb said. “It wouldn’t be any use to try to get her to laugh at him intelligently. At their age they laugh at what makes old people’s ears and stomachs ache. People our age have no effect upon the young, no matter what we say or do.”

“Odd view for a doctor,” I suggested. “Have the young not eyes? Do they not weep when you bolus ’em? Do they not bleed when you——”

Still looking down from the window, he paid no attention to me. “I like that one,” he said. “That serious, round-faced young Edgar Semple. He hasn’t followed the ‘Old Maestro’ and the others. He’s still sitting there. Engaged in one of his meditations. Odd boy; but I think he’s got something. I’d give a nickel to know what he’s thinking about. I’d give more, though, not to know what Irvie Pease is thinking about; but I always do. So does anybody that takes one good look at him.” Erb began to replace his stethoscope and blood-pressure apparatus in his satchel. “Irvie Pease’s mere shining face is always a plain proof that he never for an instant thinks about anything but himself and never will.”

“Thinks?” I said.

“Oh, of course you’re right.” Erb looked moody as he closed the satchel. “Absorption in self isn’t thought. Children naturally have the most, and even at our age there are some odious remnants; but these people who all their lives seem just made of it—pure egoism, spontaneous self-pushery, instinct for leadership and self-dramatization—why, damn it, they succeed; they get on! They put it over big on all the boobs, and I never knew a more stick-out precocious sample of it than Irvie Pease. Yes, and he’s going to be that way all his life. Why, damn it, he makes me sick!”

I laughed again, Erb spoke with so sharp a vehemence. “Could you admit,” I asked, “that you’re a pretty biased old gentleman?”

“Absolutely!” He was loudly emphatic. “Here I go, still breaking out every now and then, spending actual time blithering over a bright-faced young school-boy! Who’d believe it? It’s absurd and I think I’m crazy. I don’t care. Look here, I brought almost all of that squad of youngsters down there into this world and I swear that the first squeaks ever uttered by Master Irving Pease sounded like ‘Me! Me! Me!’ ”

“Don’t they all?” I asked.

“No, sir! Not to that extreme. Remember by when he was three how he’d bounce into a roomful o’ grown people and beller and charge about and stamp and squawk to make ’em all look at him and put on a fuss over him, how cute and smart and active he was? I never could bear sound or sight of him then, nor from then on!”

“Go it!” I said. “Old family doctor walking into dozens of familiar households for decades, I should think you’d have got used to——”

“Not a bit of it,” he interrupted. “I’ve cured hundreds of ’em in thirty-three years of practice and most of ’em were good as gold when sick and some of ’em were mighty mean little specimens; but oh my, Irvie Pease! Whenever he was sick he just grabbed the chance to be more prominent and keep everybody on the run. On your word now, have you ever got used to him, yourself?”

“‘Used to him’, Doctor? Are you trying to goad me into feeling guiltily critical of one of my own family connections?”

“Thank God he’s not one of mine!” the doctor said and moved toward the door. “Feel guilty or not as you like. There’s one person who ought to feel that way, though, and that’s Irvie Pease’s father. Sit still; don’t come downstairs with me. I ought to know my way by this time, oughtn’t I?” Then, as we heard a burst of youthful cheering from the tennis court behind the house next door, old Erb uttered a grunted exclamation and his stamping footsteps on the stairway seemed to repeat the vocal protest.

I didn’t try to get back into my work; the interruption of the doctor’s visit had dislodged me, and a few moments after he’d gone I found myself idly looking down from the window again. Young Edgar Semple alone was in view, still sitting on the grass staring at the sun-dial. Not a noticeable boy, he was short, sturdy, round-faced and serious, as Erb had said; remarkably quiet, too.

He was so quiet that I was often curious about him, wondering what his thoughts might be, though apparently they were always as undisturbing as were his voice and manner and his placid clear blue eyes. He was Irvie Pease’s cousin—his semi-adopted brother, in fact, a background figure brought up in the same house. As I stood watching him and wondering why the sun-dial seemed to fascinate him, he rose and, with his head bent in thought, walked slowly away toward the noisy tennis court behind the house. He hadn’t been thinking about the sun-dial at all, I concluded; but he’d most typically been thinking.

As my spectacled eyes followed the stocky figure of fourteen-year-old Edgar Semple on his slow and pondering way toward the tennis court, I comprehended that the boy’s long, long thoughts were occupied with a puzzle, and I guessed that his mystery might be Irvie Pease. This kind of speculative guessing being the business and habit of any writing man—always reaching for what people feel and think—I went on to wonder if Edgar mightn’t be trying to understand just what in Irvie’s character and behavior made him a leader and in particular so captivating to my niece, young Emma Millerwood.

Edgar passed from my sight, and an undeniable sense of guilt, no doubt the result of old Erb’s querulous talk, came upon me. It was preposterous; but that guiltiness increased a few moments later when I again heard a triumphant young voice. “Viva! Viva the Old Maestro!” I could distinguish the words. “Give the Old Maestro a big hand for that shot, you kids! Everybody cheer! Viva the Old Maestro! Viva!”

My interior qualm was distinct, and old Joe Erb would have had a worse one if he'd stayed. So susceptible we are to suggestion that it can be contagion: a few strongly spoken words first lodge in our ears, then convince us that we've long held opinions or feelings now at last coming to light. I wondered if what Erb, and now I, too, found irritating in Irvie Pease was our own long-past youth—or our loss of it! Herodotus said that in Egypt the old tom-cats always slew all the young ones.

## Chapter 2

THE doctor was right about Irvie Pease's father. Pretty Evelyn Pease, the mother, was doting creature enough; but, from the day of his son's birth, Will Pease seemed mastered by a kind of ancestor worship in reverse, a blinded pride and joy in this offspring, their only child. William Levering Pease was otherwise better than a merely sensible man. He was a lawyer, possessed of a conscientious but agile mind that more than once, and before he was fifty, held honorable attention in the country's highest court. His genial manner was genuine, coming from the heart; he had "literary leanings", loved scholarship, and, though a rock for his principles, he was actually, I think, the very best liked and respected citizen of our populous community.

For my part, I didn't like anybody better than I liked Will Pease. The earlier Peases and my own family had been intimate even before our country town began to swell and smoke itself up into cityhood seventy years ago, and there'd been more than one intermarriage to group us the more closely. Will Pease was my third cousin; and his wife's first cousin, Irving Millerwood, had married my sister, Harriet. Thus the young Irvie—Master Irving Millerwood Pease, named for my brother-in-law—was my sister's second-cousin-by-marriage and a third cousin to my niece, Emma Millerwood, Harriet's daughter.

These relationships, often confusing to the people actually involved, are of course but fog and cobweb on the brain of a maddened listener for whom there's an ill-advised attempt to make them clear. I'm not so rash; I'm only explaining that after old Joe Erb had unfortunately put me in the way of feeling a little fed-up with Irvie Pease sometimes, my feeling of guilt for the sensation was the more pointed because undeniably I was Irvie's relative, however distantly and intricately.

The association of the two families was further knitted because after the death of my brother-in-law, Irving Millerwood, my widowed sister, Harriet, and her little daughter had come to live with me, next door to the Peases. Will and Evelyn Pease were Harriet's contemporaries, not mine. She was fourteen years my junior; they were of like age, and throughout her girlhood and short married life she'd been the inseparable companion of Evelyn. Though upon need I could retreat to my workroom, a remodeled attic, the households in their intimacy were almost as one.

As nature seems to have provided that the most heartfelt business of any generation is the next one, the three children in the two houses, especially Irvie, largely absorbed the attention of the adults. My niece, Emma, only four when she and her mother came to live with me, was brought up, as we say, with Irvie Pease and that other boy of the Peases', Edgar Semple, whom even old Joe Erb had confessed he liked. Here was another cousinship. Edgar was an orphaned nephew of Evelyn Pease's, and Will and Evelyn had taken him in, which was like their kind hearts.

They didn't legally adopt him; but the treatment he had from them was in all respects what he'd have received if he'd been their own son—a slightly younger brother of Irvie's, warmly cherished though less on the way to become a personage. Both Edgar and Irvie seemed to take this same view. At least it was evident in Edgar's manner, and Irvie could never have been allowed to doubt his own superior prominence and promise.

Dr. Joseph Erb placed upon the father most of the blame for Irvie's youthful showiness; but here a change in American custom was concerned. Will Pease, like many another of only the fourth generation after the pioneers, had been brought up so strictly and with such consequent numberless small mortifications that on the very day after the birth of his son he told me happily that he'd never say an arbitrary no to him, the boy should live in freedom; and Will kept his word. He kept it so well that whatever else Irvie was, he was himself, his own child and on the way to be his own man. I sometimes thought, though, that he'd inherited himself—not from his lovable parents but from some everybody's darling far back in his ancestry.

Enhancing such heritage, poor Irvie had begun even in infancy to hear talk of his talents. Both parents quoted him in his presence. They dwelt upon his babyhood's precocities of wit, described with delight his young unconventionalities, and nobody need think he didn't understand. When he was no more than two, his facial expression, especially when his bodily beauty was being extolled, often made me laugh within my ribs; I was too fond of Will and Evelyn to be open with such mirth.

Will Pease, teaming, would stop a friend on a downtown street and tell him something little Irvie had said or done, and then, perhaps that evening, would let Irvie hear him repeating to callers what the astonished and delighted friend had exclaimed in comment. Thus early do some of us learn our prominence.

When Irvie was eight Will told his partners and stenographers, and everybody else on their floor of the Millerwood Building, that Irvie of his own choice had begun to read *Don Quixote* and had written "a rather remarkable little poem" about the book. Will typed copies of the poem, sent them to relatives and friends and even handed me one in the Peases' living-room after a fairly large but congenial dinner-party. He coughed, laughed placatively, and asked me if I'd mind reading it aloud to the company. I contrived to do it with gravity.

*"Don Quixote thought he was a knight  
Perhaps he was right.  
It was a long time of yore  
People do not wear armors any more.  
Though of knights now there are none  
My own heart whispers some day I will become one."*

During the reading, Will Pease sat on the edge of his chair, and, leaning forward, listened as if to angels' choiring; but when I finished he did his best to be a modest father. Coughing apologetically, he explained that though of course the verses were faulty in form he really couldn't help feeling that a certain quality in the thought made them rather worth hearing, if we hadn't minded. He had to confess that he was really pretty foolish over the boy, he went on, with an engaging laugh at himself; and probably he oughtn't to have asked grown people to listen to an eight-year-old child's poetizing. On the other

hand, he and Evelyn both had a feeling that maybe it did show just a glimmer of something perhaps rather unusual—the use of the word “whispers” in the last line of the poem, for instance—and, well, he couldn’t help feeling that the verses showed something that some day might—might develop into—well, something unusual and—and—

“You don’t need to be making excuses, Will.” The interruption came from Janet Millerwood, Will’s aunt, a woman of my own age but all her life an undiscourageable, almost professional enthusiast. “Everybody knows how unusual Irvie already is,” she said. “No other living child of eight could possibly have written anything to compare with those lines of his. I liked particularly that touch of Irvie’s about his heart’s *whispering* to him that he’d be a knight some day. The word ‘whispers’ makes it a touch that has actual subtlety. He felt the thing emotionally, you see. He didn’t just think it; he felt it. There’s analysis there, instinctive discrimination, and it’s always the true essence of poetry to deal in these shades of meaning. I’m grateful to Irvie for a real pleasure, and I think it’s all simply too wonderful for words!” She turned to her sleepy old husband. “Don’t you feel so, too, Frank?”

“I liked it first rate,” he said obediently. “It’s remarkable.”

My sister Harriet, glowing, clapped her hands. “More than just remarkable,” she declared. “There’s only one Irvie!”

I glanced at Irvie’s mother. She sat deprecatorily blushing but proud as Punch. I saw something more; behind her chair a door stood ajar and beyond it, in the hall, was the poet, himself. He’d tiptoed there to listen, being obviously certain that his poem was going to be at least mentioned. I restrained my hilarious upsurge, looked dreamy and let him go on thinking himself unseen.

The hall was dim; but Irvie’s pleasure was too bright to be obscured. Never, for sheer complacency, have I seen his eavesdropper’s smile equalled, even upon the face of an applauded adult. He waited until everybody had finished the obligatory exclamations about him; then he stole away—most likely to write another subtle poem, I suspected.

By less than this have I known full-grown persons to be ruined, so far as any comfort in their society was concerned. By less did I once see a sober-minded woman of thirty so changed that until her recovery people ran at sight of her. They didn’t run at sight of Irvie Pease, though, except toward him. Old Joe Erb was Irvie’s only detractor, a pitiable minority, and when I more or less—mainly less and with inward mirth—became somewhat of the Doctor’s opinion, I naturally didn’t tell anybody. Irvie of course, though he saw us, was almost unaware of such dim old creatures as Erb and me, plainly looked upon us as inconsequent objects in his adjacent scenery. When his attention was unavoidably drawn to myself, he showed the slightly amused tolerance for the obsolete that is really in the heart of all youth when it acknowledges the existence of a bygone era’s relics.

He accepted applause, though, from any quarter, old or young, expected it and was graciously used to it. By the time he was fifteen he’d had a lifetime of it from the Peases and Millerwoods, aunts, uncles and cousins, and from the general circles in which he moved. My sister regarded him as a part of her reverent and tender mourning for her worshipped husband because Irvie had been named for him. She could never bear the slightest hint of criticism of Irvie Pease, and as for the young Emma, my niece, she was

Irvie's serf.

Where's a man so rare that even in mature age he's acquired the art of self-protection when he speaks to ladies of their idols? On the evening after a tennis tournament arranged by Irvie Pease to celebrate his sixteenth birthday, I stirred up an actual scene at my own dinner-table where sat only my sister, my niece and myself. Emma and Harriet were exclamatory over the humorous little speech addressed by Irvie to the tennis spectators (of whom I'd been one) when he'd accepted the silver cup donated by his great-aunt Janet and awarded to him as the winner of the "tournament".

A fond flush decorated Emma's brow and cheeks; she was beginning to turn prettier after a plain childhood and the warm color made her almost lovely. "Wasn't he darlingly funny, though!" she cried. "He's always making fun of himself in the cutest way, especially when he has an honor or something bestowed on him. You know—like calling himself the 'Old Maestro' or 'Irvie, the Idiot Earl'—all those funny things he makes up to call himself. He's really so terribly modest, the way he makes fun of himself; it just makes everybody think all the more of him."

I had an unfortunate impulse to be educational. "Yes, indeed," I said airily. "Many biographies show it to be a successful method, Emma. Self-aggrandizement dressed up as mirthful self-belittlement is an excellent old device to win the innocent."

Harriet gave me a stare that should have stopped me. "You didn't think that was a charming little speech of his?" she asked.

"Yes, charming. I think Irvie had a regret, though."

"What regret?"

"I had a low idea," I said. "I thought Irvie was sorry he couldn't make both speeches—the presentation one by poor old Janet Millerwood and his own, too."

"But that would have been impossible!" Young Emma's eyes were enlarged by seeing a person of my age lost to common sense. "How could anybody make a speech presenting a cup to himself and then another accepting it? Those are two utterly different things, don't you see? They're just the opposite. So how *could* Irvie have done both?"

"He couldn't, Emma. I only had an impression he was rather restive during his great-aunt's address to him and that he was thinking of a few rather nice things about himself he could have wished her to add. That's not so rare, dear, in recipients of awards—even when they have bald or grey heads."

"Why, how awful of you!" Emma's bright hazel eyes attained their largest. "I never heard such absurd blind nonsense!"

"Don't wither me, Emma!" Like many another rash old tease of an uncle making trouble for himself, I went on with my prattle. Emma was the most athletic girl in our large neighborhood, and on a tennis court a flying marvel. "When Irvie got up the tournament to honor his birthday," I said musingly, "you don't suppose he was pretty sure of one probability, do you?"

"What probability?"

"That you'd let him win, Emma."

"Let him!" she cried. "Let him! What on earth do you mean?"

“I’m afraid I thought you slacked off rather plainly in the set you lost to him, Emma.”

“What!” She seemed to see me as a horrifying spectacle. “Of all the accusations! There never was a fairer contest. Irvie beat Edgar and he beat Mary Reame and Harry Enders, and so did I. We couldn’t play more than one set each with each or we’d have been there all night, and if every one of us didn’t play our best every time it wouldn’t have been a real tournament. Doesn’t that satisfy you?”

“It’s not to the point, dear,” I said. “I had the unworthy thought that Irvie knew you’d let him win because you always do.”

“Oh!” Emma uttered the one exclamation. It was a hurt outcry, and, although her lips moved as if she tried to add something to it, she couldn’t. In fact, she burst into tears, rose from the table and brokenly left the room.

“Thoughtful of you!” my sister said. “Do you think it considerate to tease her by casting slurs on——”

“Slurs?” I tried to laugh myself out of a false position. “Are you taking it seriously, too? Can’t I be allowed to try to be a comic old bystander once in a while? Slurs? Good heavens! They’re only children. Slurs!”

“What else could they seem to Emma?” my sister said. “What are you trying to do to her? Spoil her friendship with a dear boy who’s the splendid only son of our own kinsfolk, our next neighbors and best friends? I declare I think you’d better dose your old dried-up sense of humor with a narcotic!”

Snubbed speechless, I nevertheless strongly agreed with her as she, too, abandoned me to my coffee and the four candles that lighted our small table. Irvie wasn’t to be joked about. Henceforth when my thoughts of him tempted me to be a funny dog I’d better become a miracle of silence.

## Chapter 3

ON a rainy afternoon during the Christmas holidays I'd come downstairs to the family library and found Emma and Edgar Semple there playing backgammon. They were busier with argument, though, than with the game.

I took the book I wanted and would have departed; but Emma stopped me. She tossed her dicebox crossly upon the gaudy gaming board, said "Wait, Uncle, please"; then spoke emotionally to Edgar.

"Edgar, you've got to. You've got to tell him and let him decide. If you won't tell him I will."

Edgar shook his head. "I wouldn't."

"Tell me what?" I asked.

As usual Edgar's expression calmly revealed nothing. "It's of no consequence, sir."

"Oh, isn't it?" Emma cried. "All right, then, I'll just prove it is and pretty serious consequence at that, because it's—it's about Irvie's ruining his health!"

"His what?" I said. "To me he appears robust."

"Ah, but you don't know!" My niece's eyes were suddenly moist; she jumped up and openly suffered at me. "He's—he's killing himself!"

I tried not to laugh. "How?"

"He's smoking himself to death." Emma so unhappily believed what she said that she had ado not to sob aloud. "His father and mother don't even know that he smokes at all because old Aunt Janet promised if he wouldn't until he's eighteen she'd give him a car. But he *is*; he's been smoking for a whole year and he coughs and coughs and won't listen to anybody! Whenever I try to tell him the risk he's running, he just laughs and says we've all got to—got to"—Emma's voice broke, but she finished the dreadful quotation—"got to die some time so—so why not young!"

"Boys before Irvie have talked like that to girls," I said. "Most of 'em cough, too, when they begin to try to smoke."

"'Begin'?" she cried. "'Begin to try'? Oh, you've never known anybody that smokes and inhales every breath as Irvie does! Even *I* didn't, until last night! Nobody can *live* and smoke the way he does—sixty cigarettes an hour!"

"No," I said, "you're right. As a regular practice that'd be poor hygiene; but nobody could do it. Even Irvie couldn't, Emma."

Several tears were already out upon her cheeks; now she added others. "He does! Sixty an hour! It's how he smokes all the time except when he's with his father and

mother or Aunt Janet. I've been begging and begging Edgar to tell Uncle Will and Aunt Evelyn and he won't do it—he just won't!"

"Well——" Edgar said. "I rather think I'd better not."

"Do you want him to die?" Emma's vehemence reached this climax. "Uncle Will or Aunt Evelyn wouldn't punish him; they never did in their lives. They'd just try to save him. They'd get Dr. Erb to examine his lungs and try to cure him. What else is there to do?"

"Is that what you want me to decide?" I asked.

"You've got to do more!" She caught my sleeve imploringly. "Edgar won't tell them and if I do, Irvie'll hate me. *You* won't go on letting him smoke sixty cigarettes an hour, will you? *You*'ll tell them, won't you?"

I patted her hand. "I'm like Edgar. I believe I'd better keep out of it, Emma."

She snatched her hand away, made a fist of it with which to gouge her eyes. "Nobody!" she wept. "Nobody, nobody'll lift a finger to help!" Concluding with a gulp delivered at our consciences, she left us and went elsewhere—to continue her weeping, so I surmised, not without compassion.

"Too bad," I said to young Edgar. "What's made her so excited about it?"

He rose thoughtfully from the backgammon table. "She'll calm down out of it, sir. It doesn't amount to anything. Irvie doesn't smoke much, not more than the rest of the boys do. He just happens to be the one the girls worry about."

"But if he tells her he smokes sixty cigarettes an hour——"

"No, sir." Edgar's calm remained complete. "Irvie didn't tell her that."

"But she just declared——"

"I know," he said. "I'll explain it if you don't mind keeping it confidential." He permitted the faintest of smiles to appear momentarily upon his round face and in his blue eyes. "You know how Irvie is. He doesn't mean any harm and it doesn't do any. He just likes to keep a good deal going on about him, if you've ever happened to notice."

"Yes, I've happened to."

"I thought so," Edgar said with the cool detachment that often gave me an odd feeling about him: I seemed to be talking with an imperturbable person of my own age—or even older! "I'm afraid you might get a wrong idea of him, sir. Older people usually see only one or two sides of younger people."

I laughed. "We belong to different tribes, do we?"

"I think so, sir. It's why I've a notion that maybe in your own mind you're sometimes a little hard on Irvie."

"I'll add to your mind-reading, Edgar," I said. "If I'm hard on Irvie, as you say, maybe it's because he reminds me mortifyingly that at his age I, too, was something of a prima donna—at least to my own view."

"Yes, sir; but isn't everybody to some extent more or less just a bit that way?" Edgar seemed satisfied that we'd established this platform. "Well, then, I'll go ahead. As you implied, yourself, it's only human for a boy to like having the girls think they're worrying

about him. That's why Irvie's got 'em all believing this sixty-an-hour tragedy. He didn't tell 'em he smoked that hard; he let 'em find it out for themselves. That was just last night and made a big sensation, especially, of course, with Emma, and so——”

“But, Edgar, if he didn't tell them he——”

“No, sir. Emma got excited and counted 'em.”

“But it can't be done, Edgar.”

“No, of course not.” Edgar's smile appeared again. “She did count 'em, though—exactly sixty. Then she started the big fuss; but it was funny to see Irvie keep looking sideways at Sylvia to see what she——”

“Sylvia?” At the moment I didn't place any Sylvia among Irvie's young subsidiaries.

“Sylvia Stelling,” Edgar explained. “You've probably seen her on the beach with the rest of us at Stonehaven in summer. She's visiting Mary Reame over the holidays. Irvie's kind of impressed with her for the simple reason she's a New Yorker, and he can't ever help trying his best to impress the people that impress him. 'Most everybody seems to be like that, though, I've noticed—especially playing up strong to anyone from a bigger town. Well, Irvie did the sixty-an-hour stunt mostly on Sylvia's account; but of course the rest were expected to——”

“Edgar, you said Emma counted——”

“Yes, sir, if you don't mind remembering it's confidential. The crowd met over at our house after dinner to go skating at the Riverside Rink and come back later for hot chocolate and things. Uncle Will and Aunt Evelyn had gone to Ladies' Night at the Nineteenth Century Literary Club that Uncle Will's president of, and the house was all ours. Well, Irvie said he'd decided not to skate; he was going to stay home and smoke and read Chaucer and Montaigne——”

“Read what, Edgar?”

“Chaucer and Montaigne, sir. I mean that's what he said. Emma told him he was smoking himself to death; but anyhow she and the rest of us went and skated a while. The rink was too crowded, though, and we didn't stay long. We were back in just an hour and Irvie was sitting by the fire with the Canterbury book on his lap and a whale of a pile of cigarette stubs in Uncle Will's big glass ash-tray on the table beside him. Emma counted 'em and screamed out he'd finished sixty in that one hour—three packs. They were there, too, all right—sixty stubs—and the girls certainly made enough noise about 'em! Sylvia did some of it; so it went off pretty well, you see.”

“No, I don't see!” I said. “While the rest of you were gone had someone else come in—maybe more than one—and helped Irvie to smoke all those——”

“No, sir. Nobody but Irvie'd been there. It's simpler than it looks. I wondered how he'd done it, and when I get to wondering I always seem to have to poke around in my mind till I think out the answer. Well, I thought I had the answer to the sixty-an-hour problem; but I had to poke around in other places besides my mind to prove I was right.”

“That all?” I asked with interest. “You wanted to prove it to yourself only?”

“Yes, of course.” Edgar looked surprised. “Maybe it's a bad habit; but I seem to be like that. I always seem to have to know. Anyhow it's why, when the crowd went out to

the kitchen to make the chocolate, I looked in the table drawer and found the scissors Uncle Will keeps in there to clip things out of the newspapers that he wants to save. There were some little shreds of tobacco on the scissors and some more on the floor. You see, don't you, sir?"

"I begin to, Edgar.

"Yes," he said. "Irvie'd cut his cigarettes in two; then he just smoked a little bit of each half and put it in the ash-tray. They made such an outrageous big hill on the tray he was pretty sure somebody'd count 'em—most likely Emma because she was already fussed up about his smoking—and of course she did; so it turned out to be a pretty good go."

"Good go?" I echoed. "Is that what you call it?"

"Why, certainly, sir; that's all it was. I wouldn't be giving it away to you, of course, except maybe Emma—just now while she thinks she's all wrought up over it—well, she might get to working on you some more and there'd be just a chance you'd think you ought to tell Uncle Will and Aunt Evelyn. If you should, they'd be worried over what doesn't amount to anything at all."

"Aren't you forgetting my niece's worrying?" I asked.

"No, I'm not very likely to forget anything about Emma." Here there was something like ruefulness, a slight undertone in the voice of this uncommonly self-possessed boy. "I suppose you mean you feel she ought to be cheered up by being told about the scissors, sir?"

"Yes, that is what I feel."

He shook his head. "No, sir. Giving it away to Emma'd put me in a pretty unsporting hole, as if I'd tried to make him look goofy to you—and so to her, too. That wouldn't be right at all."

"Not even if he's been behaving goofily, Edgar?"

"He hasn't. Not really, sir. It was just a kid kind of thing to do. Don't you make any allowances," this remarkable Edgar asked me, "for Irvie's just being his age?"

"His age? It's about the same as yours, isn't it?"

A trace of pain appeared upon Edgar's brow and seemed as near a token of desperation as that unemotional surface could produce. "Look here," he said. "I simply can't be the means of getting Irvie into any sort of mess with Emma or our crowd or with you or anybody. Technically I'm an outsider in our family, sir; but you'd never in the world know it from Irvie any more than you would from Aunt Evelyn or Uncle Will. There isn't a stingy bone in his body; he's as generous as any real brother could be. I owe everything to his father and mother, and, instead of grudging it, Irvie's always wanted me to have as much from them as he has, himself—sometimes actually more. There isn't anything in the world I wouldn't do for him and jump at the chance! If through what I've told you it'd get exaggerated around that he'd been pulling a fast one to keep the girls worked up over his health——"

I interrupted. "Wasn't that actually what he did?"

"No, sir. He just put on an act—really kind of enjoyable if you look at it right—to get

the crowd going and impress Sylvia. Not that he cares anything about her personally; it was only because she's a visiting girl and from New York. That little cigarette show oughtn't to be taken up by older people. Where on earth was the least harm in it, sir?"

"But you heard Emma——"

"Yes; don't worry," Edgar said. "She really kind of enjoys making this moan over Irvie, because in the back of her head she knows perfectly well he's in robust health, as you said. Girls like making that kind of fuss and then forgetting it and then doing it again. Irvie's funny some ways; he likes having 'em do it, and I'd certainly hate to be the one to mess it all up. He's a grand old Irvie, sir, and please, I do hope my telling you about this bit of kidding isn't going to make you conscientiously feel that you ought to—ought to \_\_\_\_\_"

I put a cordial end to the boy's uneasiness. "No; I'll remember you told me in confidence, Edgar. I think perhaps you're right; girls probably do enjoy this kind of worrying. How'd you get that idea?"

"I?" Again he looked a little surprised by a question to which he'd supposed I naturally knew the answer. "Why, just from watching Emma."

## Chapter 4

IRVIE was only eight when he wrote the poem on *Don Quixote* that gave him so much tender celebration within the family and its fringes. He had more of the same from more people when he wrote, produced, directed and principally acted a full-fledged play. This was at the close of his Sophomore year at Princeton. June was in flower, not long before we all went away for the summer; Irvie and Edgar Semple, now successfully entitled to call themselves Juniors, had returned from their second bright college year, and Irvie brought with him a manuscript composed in hours spared from the curriculum. He began his casting almost within the moment of his arrival.

Emma, at dinner that evening, was too joyously excited to touch her soup; she was as full of the play as she was of the change in Irvie wrought by the past nine months in New Jersey.

"I'm really not exaggerating," she told Harriet and me. "He's really not the same person he was as a Freshman. It's really as if he'd utterly become a sophisticated man but all without the slightest putting-on or a trace of affectation. He's so aristocratically matured, so really distinguished-looking and cosmopolitan, and's spent I don't know *how* many of his week-ends in New York! He wears his clothes just beautifully but really without the slightest consciousness of them. Mary Reame's to have the principal woman's part in the play, of course——"

"Why do you say 'of course'?" Harriet asked. "Mary's a dear girl and certainly good-looking; but I don't see how that entitles her to——"

"She's perfect!" Emma was authoritative. "Irvie says he wrote the part for her and everybody knows she's always been the best actress of all the girls in our charades. Irvie's having me play her mother——"

"You? Mary's mother?" Harriet said. "At seventeen—and Mary must be twenty, isn't she? I don't see——"

"Those things don't make the slightest difference on the stage." Emma made this announcement eagerly. "He says it's almost as good as Mary's because they're all splendid acting parts and this mother has almost the strongest scene with him in the whole play, he says. He expects to finish writing the last act by lunchtime to-morrow so we're going to begin rehearsing right afterward at the Peases'. First, though, we all have to be there at eight this evening to hear him read it to us up to where it stops. He's already read it up to there to his father and mother and they say they just can't understand how in the world he ever did it because it sounds so professional."

"How about Edgar Semple?" I asked. "As they've been rooming together at college, hasn't Irvie read it to Edgar, too? What does he think of it?"

“Edgar?” Emma looked vague. “I don’t know. I suppose Edgar’s heard some of it and of course he’d like it. Anyhow, Irvie’s going to have him play one of the parts—nothing that calls for much action or emotion of course. Nobody’d ever think of Edgar as especially much of an actor, I don’t think. Irvie knows almost all of his own part by heart already and it’s more than twice as long as any other in the whole play.”

“You bet!” I said; but Emma was too exuberant to notice this chuckle, and Harriet gave me only the mere whiff of a side glance as she said, “Tell us some more about your part in it, dear.”

“Mine, Mother? Well, you see the whole play turns on the character he’s going to do, himself—a man called ‘Abercrombie Brown’. He says ‘Abercrombie Brown’ is supposed to symbolize the elements that are in all masculine characters in the world, so it means the man of the future, kind of above and advanced beyond people as they are to-day. He says it’s going to be terribly hard for him to put across the footlights; but don’t you think his conception of ‘Abercrombie Brown’ is a perfectly marvelous idea, Mother?”

“Of course she does,” I said. “Is that the name of the play, Emma—‘Abercrombie Brown’?”

“No. He thought of that; but he says the most outstanding New York playwrights don’t use that kind of title much any more. The title’s going to be ‘As If He Didn’t Know’, and don’t you think it’s perfectly splendid, Mother?”

Harriet warmly said she did. “The ‘He’ who knows is Irvie, is it?” she asked approvingly.

“Yes, ‘Abercrombie Brown’, of course, Mother. You see he goes about among the other characters probing into them and then just laughing satirically at them, and then of course the heroine—that’s Mary Reame—falls terribly in love with him; but he just laughs at her, too; so the mother of Mary—that’s me—well, she sort of takes him to task, as I understand it, and he probes her character too and shows her where she’s all wrong in her old-fashioned motherliness and her capitalistic ideas. ‘Abercrombie Brown’ is a widely known young socialistic psychologist and all that, and——”

I interrupted. “Irvie’s a socialist now, Emma?”

“Yes, of course,” she said. “He says the capitalistic system’s practically a washout and so——”

“And Edgar?” I interrupted again. “Does he feel that way, too?”

“I guess so, I don’t know; he never says much, you see. His part’s almost the shortest in the play—I believe he’s supposed to be middle-class and’s got a bank or something, the mother’s husband—and in the climax of the last act Irvie knocks him down, because Edgar’s isn’t a sympathetic part and——”

“Is that the end of the play, Emma?”

“No, the end’s the part that isn’t written yet; but he’ll have it to-morrow and he told us a good deal about what he thinks it’s going to be. It sounds marvelous—simply too marvelous, Mother!”

Harriet patted Emma’s back. “Tell us about it, dear.”

“Well, he thinks he’ll have the stage get dark and all the other characters go off, and

‘Abercrombie Brown’—I told you that’s Irvie, didn’t I?—sits on a rock—it’s in the woods somewhere—and the stage gets dark and he has a soliloquy about the dark mysterious woods being like this life of ours that nobody can find their way around in—sometimes not even he because he’s discovered he never really cared anything at all about the heroine, she’s too conventional and stodgy. Cousin Evelyn says she thinks that’s one of the most original ideas in the whole play. Then, while he’s sitting there wondering if he ought to commit suicide—why, then, just at the end, he’s going to have a light from a reflector in the wings, a kind of bright pink, and—and——”

Emma’s voice had become emotional; I helped her out. “And the light falls on the rock and ‘Abercrombie Brown’, doesn’t it, Emma?”

“Yes—and he steps up on top of the rock and stands in the light—he stands there with his arms outstretched and—and laughing.” Emma swallowed, blinked, then recovered herself and was eager again. “The idea’s pretty subtle; but it means he’s just laughing at the whole world—laughing and laughing at it! I think it’s the most marvelous idea I ever heard of! Did either of you ever hear of a play that had an end like that?”

“You mean did your mother or I ever hear of a play ending with the star in the center of the stage and a light focussed on him or her, Emma?”

“Oh, I mean the whole thing!” she cried. “I mean the light and the woods and the rock and laughing at the world—all of it! Did you ever know anything like it?”

“No, not exactly like all of it,” I admitted, conscious of another side glance from Harriet. “Not like quite all of it.”

Emma ate no more than a bite or two of her dinner and was off to the Peases’ again to hear Irvie’s reading. When she’d scurried out of the dining-room Harriet gave me the look of a woman who expects to have her feelings hurt, and said, “I don’t hope to interfere with what you probably think is your sense of humor on the subject of Irvie Pease; but to me this play sounds very like the work of youthful genius—original and daring to be unusual. You couldn’t possibly keep an open mind and not try to be funny about it—at least until you see it performed, could you?”

I said I hoped so, and, for the meekness of my tone, was ill-rewarded by my sister. She spoke not but gave me a glance in which there was nothing except suspiciousness.

A day or two after this she disorganized my afternoon’s work for me. With misgiving I heard her hurrying up the stairs from the second floor; she began to defend herself challengingly as she opened the door. “You know perfectly well I never interrupt you, myself,” she said, “and that I never let anybody else do so. Even when someone telephones on a matter of business I never——”

“What is it, Harriet?”

“It’s different,” she said. “Irvie Pease wants to consult you about his play. He’s downstairs and I think you ought.”

“Why ‘ought’?”

“Because at his age you wouldn’t have liked advice to be refused by an older and more experienced man, would you?”

“Good heavens!” I said. “Irvie doesn’t think I’m more experienced than he is, does he?”

“Of course he does!”

Irvie didn’t. When she’d gone down and sent him up, it almost immediately became plain that he didn’t. I had to confess to myself, though, that his easy smile was winsome and that, as Emma’d said, this academic year of his had given him a new manner. It seemed to consist of an offhand cheerful kind of carelessness—as if nothing mattered much but everything would probably be all right. If it weren’t, he’d not be disturbed; he’d know how to deal with it comfortably.

His former boyish gracefulness was markedly still with him. Apparently he had no consciousness of it now, although a portrait painter, seeking Irvie’s best pose, would probably have said, “Hold that!” to almost any of the new Junior’s attitudes. Even when he slid one leg over the arm of the easy-chair he’d taken after greeting me with an amused “Hello, hello, hello!” his long thin figure had picturesque quality in every easy line and contour. His face, long too, and symmetrically so, had shaped into the comely modelings that were to be permanent in his full manhood; the most critical old eye must have found them agreeable and the whole of him disarming.

More, Emma hadn’t claimed altogether overmuch for him when she said he was “distinguished-looking”; nor with that look did he wear upon his harmonious surface anything that a youthful person, his contemporary, would have called an air of conceit. To the eyes of age almost all the young look innocently self-centered, so profoundly so that we elders are flattered when they notice us; but Irvie Pease’s preoccupation with himself was of an engaging kind—his youngly restless large brown eyes had a twinkle. He’d have been observed in any crowd, and a stranger would have wished to know him. Within a month after this call upon me I overheard a plainly formidable dowager in the North Station, in Boston, exclaim as she stared at him, “Who is that fascinating-looking youth!”

Having lounged himself into the easy-chair and brought forth from a pocket of his excellent brown jacket a briar pipe, which he caressed rather than smoked, he added his own apology to Harriet’s.

“Aunt Harriet says you’re dogging away at a book or something.” (Harriet was his cousin, not his aunt; but he and Edgar had always aunted and uncled both of us.) “Sorry to interrupt; but a rather technical problem or two’s turned up in this play of mine and I thought maybe a chat with you’d shed a light. Father told me you used to do a bit along this line, yourself.”

“Yes; but I stopped it before you were born, Irving.”

“Did you really? You wrote a play and then quit?” He was interested somewhat languidly. “So you wrote one, too, did you?”

“Yes, sixteen,” I said, yielding to the ignoble impulse. Age does not remove these weaknesses of character; we elders, incurably human, still are urged from inside to bark when we’re barked at; we turn boastful when others brag to us, and we go proud when the pride of others is shown to us. Vanity evokes vanity from even the lean and slippered pantaloon.

“Sixteen? Sixteen plays?” Irvie looked more incredulous than surprised. “I don’t

suppose you mean sixteen plays that were actually produced professionally, with professional actors and New York openings and all that—do you?”

“I seem to remember that they got at least that far, Irving.”

“You don’t say!” This wasn’t an animated exclamation of his; it was only a soothing one. He plainly thought that either my doddering memories were deceiving me, or if indeed my vaunted sixteen plays had actually seen “Broadway” they now belonged to a remote, unremembered past—an extinct era when nobody knew anything of consequence and nothing really counted. However, in thinking my poor old plays unremembered, as I was sure he did, he was all too right, and I didn’t hold it against him. “Sixteen—well, well!” he said indulgently, then spoke with the briskness of one who turns to a living topic. “This play of mine, now; I’d like to get your honest opinion of it. I’d like you to be frank about it.”

“Yes, of course, Irving.”

“This play of mine,” he said, “is right now in its incipient amorphous phase. It’s plastic, like a work of sculpture I keep molding between my hands, if you see what I mean.”

“Yes, I think I do, Irving.”

His brow showed a slight corrugation, not of thought but as a sign that we were now arriving at something serious. “You see, this performance I’m doing here is only a try-out. From the way some of the older people seem to be taking it—my father, for instance, and I don’t know a better literary or dramatic mind than he’s got—well, perhaps it sounds a bit giddy in an undergraduate; but I’d rather like to see the thing on Broadway, myself. That’s why I want to make a thorough test of it with these amateurs. Well, that means I’ve got a problem before me.”

“What’s the problem, Irving?”

“I’ve got to decide,” he said, “which way I’ll do the end. Emma tells me she’s given you an idea of the plot, its symbolic meanings, the characters and——”

“She has indeed, Irving—at every meal. What’s your trouble about the end?”

“I’d hardly call it a trouble.” He made a negligent gesture with his pipe. “It’s just an argument with Edgar. You see, he’s made suggestions now and then while I was writing the piece; but sometimes he runs completely off the track. For instance, he wanted me to change quite a little of the phrasing, because people might get the idea I’m being too much like Bernard Shaw. Well, of course, even when I was a boy, I took quite an interest in moderns like Shaw and Wells and Ibsen; but what I’m really doing in this piece is shooting out in advance of that group’s psychology. I’d like to take a long progressive step forward, if you see what I mean.”

“What about the end?” I asked. “Was your argument with Edgar mainly about that?”

“In a way,” he said. “I’m sitting on the rock, you see, all alone in the dark and that’s where I have this soliloquy. You mightn’t have heard; but soliloquies are back now, you know. Until we hit me on the rock with the light, the audience gets just the voice coming out of the darkness.”

“Just the voice, Irving? Yours, you mean?”

“Yes. I make it just a slender voice, rather little and eerie, up to the cue for the reflector, and this slender, eerie little voice sums up the whole meaning—how I didn’t really care for ‘Nora’ at all and how to me all the older generations are just bunglers that have made life and the world nothing but a big sloppy mess.”

“I see,” I said. “What’s ‘Abercrombie Brown’ do about it, Irving?”

“I laugh,” he replied. “That’s where I stop using the eerie little slender voice, and the reflector comes on with me up on top of the rock, standing there laughing and laughing at everything. Well, Edgar keeps pecking at me to change all that and I think the whole play’ll be definitely lost if I do.”

“How’s Edgar want you to change it, Irving?”

“He thinks it’d be better if I’d be laughing at myself instead of at life and the world. He thinks I ought to change the soliloquy to show I’m finding out at last I’d been mistaken—all wrong about ‘Nora’ and the other characters and that everybody else was right and I’d been a fat-head about everything from the start; so ‘Abercrombie Brown’ would end the play by laughing at himself instead of at life and the world. I don’t like it. It’d change the psychology of the whole play. It’d be dangerous.”

“You’re sure?” I asked.

“Definitely,” Irvie said. “Some people might like it; but on the other hand this isn’t a play for the groundlings. The idea of having me mistaken about everything and laughing at myself for a fool looks to me like giving up all the subtlety I want to bring out. The very point I’m definitely meticulous about is hitting a terrifically modern note. I’d lose it if I’d laugh at myself instead of at life and the world.”

“Then Edgar’s idea is all wrong, is it?”

“It’s bright but it’s cheaper,” Irvie said. “I don’t deny I’ve been considering it; but it’d belittle my whole conception of ‘Abercrombie Brown’. No, it won’t do. I shan’t use it. I \_\_\_\_\_”

“Just a moment,” I interposed, and I ought to be ashamed to admit that my tone was gravely insidious. “Am I right in surmising your conception of ‘Abercrombie Brown’ to be somewhat in the nature of a self-portrait, Irving?”

“Oh, no doubt,” he said carelessly. “But of course myself seen objectively.” He slid his leg from the arm of the chair and rose. “I’d like to spend more time with you talking over things informally this way; but Father’s given me our old stable to make over into a playhouse, I’ve got ’em all working out there and I’d better toddle along to hold ’em down. They’re liable to run haywire building the proscenium.”

He returned his pipe to his jacket pocket, and, as he sauntered to the door, I comprehended that for an otherwise idle quarter of an hour or so of his all he’d desired me to be was an audience. “Glad to have you look in any time and see what we’re doing to the old place,” he said in farewell. “We may make the old Pease horse-barn the foundation of a Civic Theatre. The town needs one. ’Bye-bye.”

Evidently he informed his company of players that he’d been in consultation with me. When I came downstairs I found Emma just entering the house and plainly fresh from stage carpentry; she had sawdust on her dress and a curl of wood-shaving in her hair. “I’m proud of you!” she cried. “Irvie says you agreed with him on all the points he consulted

you about.”

“He what, Emma?”

“Consulted you about,” she said. “I think it’s just darling, and so are you!”

I didn’t explain to her that he hadn’t consulted me. In fact, she didn’t give me the opportunity. She was finding life and the world so excitingly beautiful that she was embracing even an uncle.

## Chapter 5

THE Peases' no-styled brick house, like my own of the same groping decade, was a product of the early Twentieth Century when the larger migrations out of downtown crowding and smoke began in most of our active cities. It was Will Pease's father who built their house; and other families of that generation (my own) came one after another to build and live in the neighborhood. So, in this more amply spaced "residence section", old intimacies were continued and, later, repeated among the children and grandchildren of the Nineteenth Century's "prominent citizens". Of this expanded group of several hundred people, the Pease family and its connections were the central cluster.

This wasn't the result of conspicuous wealth or fashionableness; other families surpassed them in both and the Peases weren't ambitious that way. They were important because Will Pease and his father, and his grandfather, too—a genial greybeard in black broadcloth, well-remembered from my boyhood—had always been known for their goodwill, good judgment and unalterable principles. They were kind, responsible men, respected for their abilities and loved for their charity of mind and of purse. Of all the Peases the present head of the family, Will, was the modest and worthy topmost; and if our big town recognized any one person as its "principal citizen", that person was he. Add that if any one house was the special dispenser of hospitality and friendly discourse his was, and the stir made by his young son's play becomes comprehensible as fanfare attending a distinguished event.

. . . Shaded by old forest trees behind the Peases' tennis court, there stood a spacious brick stable. Will's father had pioneered into this bosky region without an automobile and before the close of the horse-and-buggy age; but Will had built a garage closer to the house and more convenient of access. Now the long-vacant stable resounded to hammer and saw, as the exertions of the cast of "As If He Didn't Know" and a pair of hired carpenters re-shaped the whole ground floor, "carriage-house", box-stalls and all, into a recognizably modernist theatre—designed by Irving Millerwood Pease, so stated in the printed program.

Luck in weather was with Irvie. There was never a balmier coolness under a clear moon than on the night in the last week of that June when Harriet and I crossed through the shrubberies of our own back yard and followed a path to the Peases' driveway. There we joined a scattered procession of our friends, relatives and acquaintances, moved with them toward a roseate effulgence among the big trees. It defined itself neatly as we passed beyond intervening foliage and saw the fiery lettering: "NEW CIVIC THEATRE".

"Irvie's done just everything!" Harriet said, exhilarated but nervous. "Think of his having even that neon sign over the old carriage-house doors. Really now, you'll have to admit that's wonderful. I do hope she won't forget any of her lines; she's so excited I

don't know what she'll do! She wouldn't eat a thing, just rushed over here at six o'clock to begin being made up. Think of her trying to look like Mary Reame's mother!"

"She won't, Harriet. If she wears that grey wig she'll look a lot older than Mrs. Reame. When girls under twenty make themselves up to look forty they——"

Harriet, of course, wasn't listening. She made a dart away from me and caught at the arm of a friend. "Carrie Reame! Isn't it exciting? I know your Mary'll be perfectly splendid. We're all so delighted she's playing 'Nora'. Emma says 'Nora's' a perfectly Ibsenesque part. Doesn't Mary love it?"

"Wild over it!" Mrs. Reame laughed. "Of course it's rather short for a leading part, especially in her scenes with the hero, and she's worried over what to do with her hands during his longer speeches; but she adores every word of the play. She thinks the audience is going to find it marvelous."

"So does Emma—too marvelous for words!"

Harriet fluttered back to me as we turned pink with our near approach to the neon light. Then we passed the portal of the "New Civic Theatre" and were within the somewhat odorously new-painted auditorium, which was already half-filled and murmurous with congenial chatter. "A hundred and eighty invitations," Harriet said, as we found seats among cousins of ours. "Irvie's worked so hard, I do hope they'll all come." They all did, almost. By eight o'clock, the initial dramatic moment, all but three or four of the hired chairs were occupied, and, looking about me, I saw no face that wasn't amiably expectant. Two of those faces were, indeed, touchingly so, I thought, as I caught a glimpse of them between intervening heads. The shining eyes and flushed cheeks of Will and Evelyn Pease betokened a tender pride already too effervescent to be decorously concealed.

Three formal resounding knocks behind the scenes brought the proper hush upon the spectators; chords from a piano were heard, accompanying a young male voice, and, when the yellow denim curtains had yielded to insistence and jerked apart, an interior "set" was disclosed wherein I recognized several articles of furniture of my own. More conspicuous, however, was Evelyn Pease's piano at which Irvie sat playing rather sparsely and singing a song to Mary Reame. (Words and music by Irving Millerwood Pease, the program imparted in an asterisked note.)

Mary, as "Nora", was a pretty picture in pink organdy; but probably only the eyes of her immediate family lingered upon her. Irvie was all in white with a red rose in his buttonhole; his voice, not large, was a tenor with the unforgettable vibrancy that stirs the heart; and the song, though completely of that beginning of the "crooning" epoch, was as honeyed as its title: "My Apple Blossom, You".

Inconsistently, just after the song, Irvie, as "Abercrombie Brown", began to deride "Nora" for being a creature of the sentimental era—"a mere saccharine echo of the Gay Nineties" he called her, presumably because he perceived that she'd fallen in love with him while he sang.

"Did you ever see anything so artistic?" the woman in front of me leaned back to whisper to Harriet. "I mean the way Irvie checked the applause after his song—just the slightest movement of his hand. If he weren't really an artist he'd have wanted it. My Tommy's got only a bit-part and he's scared to death; but Irvie's as cool as cool! I do

hope these people appreciate what he's giving them."

She needn't have worried about that; old Joe Erb hadn't come, and, in the audience of this overwhelmingly one-boy play, I was, all by myself, the whole of the cold-hearted minority. Like many another actor Irvie seemed to feel that the presence of an audience demanded from him a sonorous and yet elegant artificiality. Thus his voice became richly musical and his pronunciation execrable. He'd blur one *r*, burr the next, and what he did to short *a*'s and broad *a*'s made my head swim, for I'm cursed with a sensitive ear. Once he said, "I awsked you not to ahsk me to ask that of myself"; I'll swear that was the "line" and how he spoke it. While he talked and talked and talked, his posture never failed in picturesqueness—as when he stood framed in a rear doorway and took the rose from his buttonhole to toss it scornfully to "Nora". Most of the time he had his fellow-actors' backs or profiles to the audience while he held the center of the stage, a process notoriously damaging to any dramatic simulation of reality. Altogether I thought that seldom in amateur theatricals, and even in the saddest professional experiences of my own theatrical past, had I seen worse acting.

The play itself, as I'd already gathered, was of an old vintage frequently rediscovered by the young; it was Bernard Shaw filtered down to platitudinous lees. Nothing was plausible; nothing could be believed. No group of human beings in the world would have stood about a room, motionless and dumb, to be as incessantly scored upon, victoriously insulted and mocked as were the subordinates in this play—all except "Abercrombie Brown" himself being of course subordinates. The meekest of stodgy souls would have ganged up on "Abercrombie Brown" and thrown him out long before the end of the first act.

By that time I was myself too drearily an old stodgy soul to be amused—and yet, round about me, were a hundred and eighty people, more than half of them of mature age, all listening submissively. Submissive? They sat entranced, many of them leaning forward, hanging upon every word from the stage; and, when the pair of curtains twitched to a juncture, closing the act, the "New Civic Theatre" resounded. Old Janet Millerwood could be heard shouting "Brava! Brava!" through an uproar of applause that was unmistakably spontaneous and genuine.

## Chapter 6

THE demonstration swelled until Irving Millerwood Pease had twice stepped forth between the curtains and twice gravely bowed with the reticence appropriate to an artist who receives impersonally a tribute to his art.

The woman in front of me, Ella Pease Martin, a widowed relative of Harriet's and mine, squirmed round, tilted her chair backward and seized Harriet's hand rapturously. "Isn't it just beyond words!" she cried. "Could anybody believe he's still only a boy in college? I thought my Tommy did awfully well, too, didn't you? You wouldn't have known he was scared, would you?"

"No, not the least bit." Harriet was ecstatically responsive. "Of course some New York manager'll gobble this up. It's 'way beyond the professional plays being put on nowadays; but I do hope Irvie won't decide to be an actor. He must just write, write, write! Weren't you astonished to see how almost middle-aged Emma really did make herself look? Of course she had only the one line in this act; but I do think——"

I got up and went outdoors to smoke. Other people were standing about under the moonlit trees, similarly taking advantage of the intermission, and I heard them murmuring to one another adjectives of delight. Wondering what was the matter with me—grotesquely critical of a boy's show in a barn—I kept away from them, and did again, half an hour later, after Irvie'd been brought out four times at the conclusion of the second act.

It was the final act that brought me my two surprises. The first was Edgar Semple, who hadn't made his appearance in the play until then, though "Abercrombie Brown" had several times satirically referred to the tinsel soul of "Octavius Thompson", the banker, "Nora's" father. Edgar now came upon the stage as "Octavius Thompson", and for the first time that evening there seemed to be a convincingly actual, quiet-spoken, unstuffed person in this play.

His "make-up" as a middle-aged stoutish businessman was so real that I'd hardly have known him, and he made everything that he did and said seem what we call "natural". I thought it fortunate for the almost operatic Irvie that this excellent actor hadn't appeared earlier in the piece, and, when the star negligently knocked him down in the top moment of the climax, my perverted sympathies were all with the fallen banker.

I had my second surprise a few moments later when Irvie began his soliloquy in the suddenly darkened modernistic woodland that was the "set" for that act. Instead of using the end he'd originally written for the play—"Abercrombie Brown's" summing up everything except himself as a mess and "just laughing and laughing at life and the world"—the author had switched to Edgar Semple's suggestion. The soliloquy, avoiding its original self-celebration, dealt with "Abercrombie Brown's" discovery that all through

the play he'd been not a heroic intellect mocking fools but a vainglorious ass.

In his talk with me Irvie'd dismissed this idea, and it must have been hard for him to swallow; but, though the swallowing took time, he had done it. He'd been able to perceive the placative value of Edgar's substitute finale. It appeared to belittle the hero; but it didn't. It really enhanced him by making him humanly likeable.

I thought that even this dotting audience might have tired somewhat of the inexhaustible rightness and too-conscious superiority of "Abercrombie Brown"; but "Abercrombie Brown" now, at last, appeared as capable of modesty. In Edgar's version "Abercrombie Brown" found himself in the end to have been a consistent bungler, the one wrong-headed fool among the estimable fellow-mortals he'd been deriding. When the pink light from the reflector broke the darkness, its shaft fell not upon Irvie standing elevated and with outstretched arms laughing as from the mountain. On the contrary he was using the rock as a desk, and a pad of scratch-paper, brought from his coat-pocket, for the writing of notes of apology to all the other people in the play. Finally, as a personal touch, and stepping humorously out of character, he wrote and read an apology to the members of the audience, asking their pardon for all the nonsense they'd been inveigled into hearing from a young man who didn't know any better.

The hit was palpable. Irvie's whimsically engaging smile and deprecatory little bow, as he rose and spoke these last words directly across the footlights, captivated everybody. I, too, was a victim of that charm and found myself applauding till the palms of my hands burned.

The curtains did not close. Irvie bowed and bowed; then stepped into the woodland wings and brought forth lovely Mary Reame. They took two "calls" together, and after that Irvie summoned his whole company, stood at the center of the line of triumphant young people in the warm glow of footlights, and laughingly shared his honors. It was a pretty sight, and Emma's happy face—the happiest of all, I thought—made me wonder again, and with a pang, what the devil I'd been doing inside myself all evening, demanding a masterpiece! The end of the play, in fact, was of its small kind almost that and I could have cheered Irvie for it—until I remembered that it was Edgar Semple's.

There were "refreshments" outdoors; candle-lit white tables were set in the moonlight under the trees and colored waiters in white brought patés and salads and ices and coffee. Ella Martin and Harriet, returning from an affectionate rush upon the dressing-rooms to congratulate the playwright-actor and their own Emma and Tommy, placed me at a table and talked across me with appropriate exuberance. What had most importantly delighted both Emma and Tommy, I gathered, was that there hadn't been a "single hitch". Harriet became impressive; she might have been conducting a muted passage in a symphony. "Not a single one! Emma says that's the most marvelous thing of all, because Irvie changed the whole end of the play at the very last moment. They didn't any of 'em know he was going to do it that way, so the end was as much a surprise to them as it was to the audience."

"Irvie hadn't rehearsed it?" I asked.

"No, not with the rest of 'em. He didn't decide on it until after the dress rehearsal last night, Emma says. He had them all go home and then he worked it out and got Edgar to

write it on a typewriter and learned it by heart before he went to bed. Emma says the most wonderful thing of all is how he acted it to-night—that utter change—without a single hitch.”

I thought interestedly about that typewriting of Edgar’s. I didn’t believe he’d done it from Irvie’s dictation; but evidently he wasn’t explaining this to anybody—nor, thus far, was Irvie. On the white table before me moonshine mingled with candlelight, and behind me I heard the unmistakable bass-viol voice of our city’s foremost authority upon Elizabethan Drama, old Judge Samuel Johnson Wilboyd. Though my back was toward him, my mind’s eye saw his zooming words blow forward the grey fringes of that unique relic, a shield against dental-minded gossips, his great lambrequin moustache.

“Curb that mock-modest laughter, Will, my dear fellow; it deceives not me. Your son is not of the herd and you well know it. I say he is a dramatist. In time his works will go over this country and people will know that the light the theatre has so long awaited has come. Foster that talent. See that his university courses feed it. When he shall have graduated see to it that he have pens, ink, paper, a secluded room in which to use them. You need do nothing more.”

Will Pease spoke apologetically. “His mother’ll be delighted when I tell her what you’ve said, Judge, and of course it’s gratifying that Irving shows this dramatic talent. We’re glad he’s so versatile; but you see I—that is, it’s rather been planned that he’s to go through law school after he leaves college—he and our other boy, Edgar Semple, too—and that then they’ll both be coming into my office. You’d sanction his making the law his profession, wouldn’t you, Judge?”

“Ordinarily, yes. Beginning his professional life in your office, Will, my dear fellow, would be an exceptional privilege for any ordinary young man. Let young Semple have that, if you please, but not your son. The masterstroke with which he ended this evening’s drama says ‘No’ to any other calling. Without that masterstroke we of the audience might have been—well, slightly surfeited with the prevalence of the leading character, ‘Abercrombie’. We might, indeed, have gone away thinking him rather egregious. But no, in the very last moments before the final curtain, the author introduced a legitimate but wholly unexpected dramatic surprise that won all hearts. It was, in the common phrase, electric.”

“Yes, I felt so, too,” the pleased Will said. “Even to his mother and me it was a surprise.”

“Will, my dear fellow, it was more. That soliloquy, I say, was a masterstroke. I yield to no man in my respect for the law as a great profession; but I say to you that you must—I employ the word ‘must’ advisedly—give your son his chance to become our leading dramatist.”

I didn’t hear Will’s flattered response; Ella Martin was pushing a plate at me. “Eat your chicken salad,” she said. “Wake up, eat your salad and say something! Where’s your enthusiasm? Anybody’d think you haven’t enjoyed yourself this evening. Nothing at all to say?”

“I’ve been wondering,” I explained. “In all this flood of praise I haven’t heard anybody mention the merits of young Edgar Semple.”

“Of Edgar?” Harriet murmured, and both she and Ella Martin looked vaguely

surprised. “His merits? You mean his acting?”

“He was rather the villain of the piece, wasn’t he?” Ella said. “Did you think he stood out especially? Come to think of it, I can’t remember anything he did except get knocked down. Can you, Harriet?”

“No, except I thought he had a good make-up.” Then both of them began to talk again of Irvie and Emma and Ella’s Tommy.

Even Edgar’s acting, which to my singular mind resembled a good deed in a naughty world, threw not a candle’s beam upon these ladies or upon the eminent Sam Johnson Wilboyd or any other than myself. In a naughty world candles haven’t much chance against limelight.

## Chapter 7

IN the “new civic theatre”, during this supper interval, the chairs were being piled upon the stage to clear the floor for dancing, and an orchestra had arrived. When jazzy strains issued from the old stable, making me anxious to go home, the young people fluttered pinkly under the neon light, hurrying through the doorway to begin their coupled, rhythmic meanderings, and Harriet restrained me.

“Don’t be such an old dry-as-dust! Surely you want to watch her, don’t you—anyhow for a little while—when she’s having such a happy time? Of course Irvie’ll dance first with Mary Reame, as she’s his leading lady; but—— Oh, come along, just for half an hour or so. It isn’t going to hurt you, is it?”

I said I didn’t know and we went in, stood near the wall and watched the dancing. That is to say, of course, that most of the time Harriet and I watched our Emma, who was dancing with short Tommy Martin and looking over his shoulder at the graceful sinuosities of Irvie Pease with Mary Reame.

Almost eighteen and neither a belle nor a wallflower, Emma was more what people call a “nice-looking girl” than a pretty one. She had a pleasantly shaped face, an athletic tall figure, and as for her hair, she herself used the old description, “just hair-colored hair”. She hadn’t any coquetry at all, lacked all the luring devices for which the new psychology and crooned slang have supplied unappetizing definitions, and she wasn’t often called “charming” by even her most affectionate relatives. She had a studious, straightforward mind, not a brilliant one; but I have no child of my own, and ever since she and her mother had come to live with me when Emma was a solemn good little thing, she was dear to me—dearer, indeed, than all else. It seemed to me that she danced prettily even with Tommy Martin, a partner two inches shorter than herself.

Irvie Pease and Mary Reame were spectacular. Mary was a golden-headed girl, delicately lovely, more a slim lily than the apple blossom Irvie’s song called her, and in their dancing now, as in the play, the two still were star and leading lady. To and fro and everywhere, they intricately swung and glided, delighting the older people on the sidelines until another boy “cut in”, took Mary away and Irvie was released to his radiant mother. She’d been awaiting this opportunity.

“It’s really important,” I heard Evelyn say as she seized his arm. “I coaxed Judge Wilboyd to wait until I could get hold of you. He says it’s time he was in bed; but he’s so anxious to——”

She brought Irvie into a group of parents and other spectators near me, and a moment later, in spite of the yammering “music”, I again heard imposing and resonant accents from under the grey lambrequin of moustache:

“You are a dramatist!”

Harriet thought I might be missing this, nudged me to listen. “Isn’t that splendid? Just think: it’s Judge Wilboyd himself saying it to Irvie!”

“My lad,” the Wilboydian thunders proclaimed, “that masterstroke at the end! Had it not been for that we might have thought you only a promisingly talented youth; but the end proves you capable of inspiration, and that is genius. That touch—the sudden deeply humorous intimacy with yourself—and then, with what disarming charm, the final intimacy with the audience, too! Perhaps only youth has these darings. Perhaps, as a more finished playwright later, you’ll not surpass this one. My boy, tell me how that idea came to you.”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Irvie laughed as if to prove he knew how much he was being over-praised. “How does anybody get ideas? I didn’t decide on this one till the very last; I wasn’t sure it’d go. I’d considered several ends for the play and the one I used I finally sort of worked out with—with—I mean I more or less worked it out with Edgar. Really I expect a good deal of the credit for it ought to be given to him because of the way he kept insisting on my using it. He——”

“Ah, yes; but it was yours!” This was the authoritative interruption, and thus was Irvie’s revelation of his debt corrupted. “The other young man insisted; but only upon what you had created. Modesty’s becoming but mustn’t bemuse us. Your father and mother will nourish this dramatic gift. Your career lies before you and——”

Here outrageous drum, saxophone and marimba prevailed over oratorical pontificacies, and a moment later a laughingly blushing Irvie emerged from the group. Perhaps he couldn’t have made his tribute to Edgar more definite without yelling, and maybe it was too much to ask that in this hour of triumph he should go about explaining everything fully to everybody. Probably he felt that he’d done his best to give credit where credit was due, and, if people insisted that all of it was due himself, that wasn’t his fault. Already loping and gliding to the music, he danced his winding way among fluctuant couples to Mary Reame, and, in turn “cutting in”, swept her jubilantly away and away. Her look was that of the Sleeping Princess just awakened and understanding how.

Emma was now dancing with Edgar, her second partner shorter than herself. Edgar danced competently, I thought, and seemed to be talking, too, with his usual placidity. I doubted that she listened; and her frank face began to be wistful. No matter where they moved together she seemed to be looking over Edgar’s shoulder at Irvie and Mary.

Not enjoying this impression, I made such a fuss about the effect of the orchestra on my head that Harriet crossly succumbed. We found Evelyn and Will and as we said goodnight to them, and Harriet produced final raptures over the play, I thought this must have been the proudest and happiest evening in the lives, thus far, of those two good souls. Will shook my hand tumultuously and Evelyn joyously kissed both Harriet and me. Then my sister and I got ourselves out into the beautiful but unquiet night. The whackings and thumpings of that expensive orchestra became less obdurate upon us as we followed the path from the Peases’ driveway and trudged back through our own shrubberies.

“I think,” Harriet said, breaking the silence between us, “I do think it was all just heavenly and Emma’s really having the time of her life. Of course Irvie feels he ought to dance more with Mary than with the other girls—I mean during the first part of the

evening—because she had the best girl’s role and did it so well, so it’s appropriate he should. It was nice of him to tell old Wilboyd that Edgar’d helped him with the end, don’t you think?”

“Yes. At least he rather tried.”

“Of course it couldn’t have amounted to much, Edgar’s help,” Harriet said. “Irvie always has so many more ideas than poor Edgar has—but it was like Irvie to want to bring Edgar in, if there was any possible excuse for it. Don’t you admit now that the whole thing’s been most significant as the promise of a brilliant career?”

“A theatrical one, Harriet? Irvie’s to abandon his father’s plans for him to come with Edgar into the law office?”

“Nonsense!” she said. “He’ll be all the greater lawyer because to-night he’s proved what a splendid creative mind he has. I don’t believe you can deny it.”

“I don’t, Harriet. When I think how he keeps us all thinking about him I can’t deny that he must have one of the most interesting minds in the world.”

“At last!” she exclaimed. We’d now come into the house and she dropped her light wrap on a hall table. “Thank heaven at last you’ve admitted he’s what everybody else has always known him to be—the brightest dearest boy in the world!” She went into the library and turned on a reading-lamp. “I’m going to sit up for Emma. You go to bed and repent your old sins.”

It wasn’t late—I often worked far deeper into the night—and I went up to the third floor and my workroom; but I didn’t try to work. I didn’t even sit down; I walked the floor, compelled to ponder upon the interesting mind—and character—of Irvie Pease. I’ve usually found that if I can see behind the shapings of any grown man’s face the shapings it has worn when the man was a boy, then I know the man. So, too, if a boy’s face shows me what it will be in maturity, then I know the boy. Irvie was now half-man, half-boy, and to-night I’d seen both faces, the boy’s and the man’s.

There was nothing unkind in Irvie. He was light-hearted, gayly clever and instinctively winsome, and he was a delight to the eye; but to delight all eyes and ears was meat and drink to him. In youth that’s to be expected and only the repetitious shocks that produce maturity can banish it; but to-night I didn’t see Irvie’s coming years bringing with them that sort of maturity. I could only see him being always unalterably his own hero.

. . . My windows were open, and high-flying beetles bumped the screens. Other bumps were faintly on the air, the distant tom-tom thumpings from the Peases’ old stable where the young danced to barbaric rhythms. Once I heard drums and saxophones pause for an interval and vaguely the clapping of the dancers’ hands claiming an encore, and I paused beside a window to listen. The encore didn’t come—evidently the musicians had set their minds to a recess—so for a time the night was as still as the overhead moon itself. Then I heard a sound that puzzled me because it seemed a human one and to come from near the lilac bushes close to the house, below my window. It wasn’t repeated and I thought I could easily have been mistaken; but it had seemed very like a brief utterance of pain—a sob in the voice of a young girl.

I stood listening for perhaps as long as five or six minutes, and heard nothing more.

Then I went downstairs; but at the top of the lower flight, in the “upstairs hall”, I paused, hearing the front door open and close. Harriet called from the library: “That you, Emma? Is the party all over?”

“No, not for quite a while yet probably.” Emma’s voice was cheerful. “I just thought I \_\_\_\_\_”

“Then why did you——”

“Oh, I don’t know, Mother.” Emma seemed to be casual. “I just thought I might as well come home.” She went into the library and I continued on my way to the lower floor; but half way down the stairway I stopped again. Harriet must have seen something that dismayed her; I heard her cry out:

“Emma! Why, what—— Dear child, you look as if——”

“No, I don’t. Nothing of the kind! I’m only—— I’m——” Emma’s tone, sharp for a moment, went into tremolo. Though I could see neither of them, the picture I had was of Emma drooping into a chair as Harriet dropped a book and jumped up to face her.

“Emma! What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, I tell you! I just got tired; I don’t care to dance with Edgar Semple forever, Mother!”

“But surely other boys——”

“Oh, yes, plenty enough; it wasn’t that.” Emma’s voice, though doing its best, had the quaver in it again. “I only—— I mean everything was all just lovely. Mother, I’ve always thought Mary Reame’s the most utterly perfect girl in the world. Tell me something. I’ve never been in any theatricals before; but doesn’t it usually happen that the ones who are lovers in the play sort of fall in love with each other outside in real life, too? It’s usually like that in theatricals, isn’t it? It—it seems pretty natural that they would, doesn’t it?”

Harriet spoke quickly. “You don’t mean Irvie hasn’t danced with anybody except Mary all evening?”

“Yes. He—he didn’t. Tommy laughed and said Irvie’d told him Mary was such a—such a honey-dazzle in his play he was going to dance with her all night and not anybody else—at all.”

“Well, but, dear, that doesn’t mean he——”

“I think it does, Mother. I think it’s just right, myself, especially after the beautiful way she did her part and how wonderful she looks. It’s right he should show everybody his appreciation and—and how he feels about her. I ought to be *glad* it’s like that, oughtn’t I? I can—I can—I *will* be glad, Mother!”

Then there were only vocal murmurings and a faint rustle of garments that made me think Harriet knelt before Emma and took her in her arms. I turned about on the stair and went back to my workroom and more pacing the floor. It had indeed been a sob I’d heard beneath my window.

When all but one of the people who surround any human being look upon him with something close upon adoration, the single cold heart should search itself. I searched mine and knew why my thoughts of Irvie Pease were no longer tinged by the hidden mirth that often moved me during his childhood and his earlier boyhood.

Youth and young love, both in blinders, dance or weep along the crest of flower-edged cliffs, and the better a youth is loved—and the more who love him—the more and deeper are the hurts that he can lightly do.

## Chapter 8

WITH their families, the owners of two of our newspapers had been pleased members of Irvie's audience; few professional dramatic performances anywhere have received more enheartening attention from the press. Sunday editions printed reproductions of photographs of the assembled cast; there were others of Irvie as "Abercrombie Brown" and one showed him seated at a desk supposedly writing his play. Another, most effective of all, was of Irvie at the piano singing "My Apple Blossom, You" to Mary Reame, who leaned toward him exquisitely spellbound. There was also an elaborate interview with Irvie.

The young dramatist had received her "graciously", the interviewer said. He had shown her over his New Civic Theatre; but when she asked him if he hadn't already planned a Broadway production for his play, striking while the iron was hot, he'd smilingly replied that really he hadn't thought much about it, though possibly he'd decide to place "As If He Didn't Know" with a New York agent who'd see about interesting a manager—the interviewer thought there'd be no doubt of its being immediately "snapped up". Other than this the young author had no plans for the immediate future except to accompany his family as usual to Stonehaven, the Atlantic resort where the Pease family had spent the hot months "since time immemorial".

On the whole he treated his "new fame" lightly, the interviewer said; he'd even expressed doubt that he'd ever care to write another play. "I just wanted to prove to myself I could do it," he was quoted as saying. She reminded him that not only his writing but his acting, too, had been loudly praised by the audience; and here again his modesty shone forth. He responded that if he hadn't been "quite indeed a ham" this was because of the inspiration derived from "playing opposite a perfectly gorgeous leading lady", and the interviewer said gayly that the "young writer-actor-director's face lit up most significantly" as he paid this tribute—she couldn't help thinking that so Prince Florizel must have looked when he spoke of the lovely Perdita. The column ended by mentioning that its author parted with reluctance from Irvie and "that laughing light I fancy one would always see in his eyes."

. . . That phrase about the Pease family's spending the hot months at Stonehaven "since time immemorial" I thought genuinely Irvie's, not the reporter's. Time immemorial on the lips of the young is sometimes a reference to times astonishingly recent. The Pease family had been spending July and August at Stonehaven for a dozen years; but as that took Irvie's memory back to when he was only eight, the epoch was doubtless, for him, astronomical. I'd been a Stonehaven summer visitor, myself, for about thirty years and was still, in the estimation of previously established summer residents, not to mention the

“natives”, something of an upstart.

Harriet and Emma thought summer on that north-eastern strip of rock, pine, juniper, sand and salt surf the “next thing to heaven”, and it was Harriet who’d coaxed our home neighbors thither with us when Irvie and Edgar were small boys. Will Pease’s law office was always too busy to let him have a full season away, and this year he wasn’t to join us until the second week in August. The evening before the rest of us left, in early July, Harriet and I walked across the unseparated lawns to say good-bye to him. We found Emma already there, and Irvie, perched atop a wardrobe trunk in the hall, practicing palmistry upon her, predicting grotesque events for her future.

In the living-room where we went to sit with Evelyn and Will, we could hear my niece’s outcries of protest and Irvie’s mock-solemn assertion that he was a scientific prophet. Emma, we heard him insist, was destined to be expelled from Bryn Mawr promptly after her matriculation there in September. “No, you can’t escape it, my child. It’ll be for gambling and leaving a kangaroo in the president’s office.” Then he and Emma whooped in young hilarity as he slid from the trunk and they pattered down the hall on their way to outdoors. Emma’s laughter sounded true—even though I thought I heard a catch in its overtones. She’d got at herself pretty thoroughly, I knew; and when she was living up to her ideals—being a “good sport”—she didn’t mean to let anybody suspect it.

Will Pease’s good grey eyes shone with pleasure. “Everything’s going to be all right,” he said. “The day after the play, what with all the excitement and publicity, I’m afraid I wondered if he mightn’t want to follow that line the rest of his life; but no, he’s sound. He’ll tread the path his grandfather and I planned for him the night he was born. Naturally I want him to love literature and the drama; but only as pleasures for the mind, not as a vocation.”

Evelyn smiled a little wistfully. “He could hardly help feeling the temptation, though, could he, Will? He found the name of some agent in a theatrical magazine he bought, and he sent off the manuscript Tuesday; so if a manager takes it he’d really be almost compelled to go to New York and be a playwright, wouldn’t he?”

“Not a bit of it,” Will said easily. “He and the rest of us would just go to the opening night, and naturally that’d be a gratification; but of course he’s got to finish college and go through law school. I’ve talked to him about it, and thank goodness he knows what’s solid and better worth while than theatrical glory! When he’s out of law school he’ll come back to his home town and live here, a good citizen and a good lawyer. We couldn’t well look forward to anything finer for him, could we?”

With a depth of feeling that moistened his mild eyes, Will addressed the question to me, and for a moment I was at a loss. Built unquestioningly in his own father’s image, Will Pease had the simple, constant hope to see his son honorably follow the same pattern. Like many another good soul certain that he and his forebears have found the best in life, Will had a profound urge, probably biological, to see his offspring settled into that perfectly believed-in groove. I had doubts; but with Will’s appealing eyes upon me I couldn’t even jocosely hint them. To his endearingly naïve question, my response was only, “No, Will; of course not.”

“No, of course not!” Brightened as readily as is a child, he repeated my flimsy confirmation. “American life doesn’t offer anything better. There isn’t much money in it,

maybe, and no wide fame—just the esteem and goodwill of his fellow-townsmen—but I say that a good American citizen living up to his highest principles in a good American community like this finds what we call ‘the good life’. Our son knows that as well as we do, Evelyn, and I thank God for it!”

Evelyn spoke softly and reached out from her chair to touch his hand. “Yes, Will; so do I.”

Her gesture touched more than Will’s hand; it touched my heart: those two were so assured that their son would preserve the perfection they saw in him. If he’d fail them, their sky would fall; but such chances are the common lot of all mothers and fathers. I could hope that this loving pair might always somehow keep themselves as proud of their Irvie as they were to-night in their certainty that he’d live the “good life” they lived, themselves.

. . . When we’d said our temporary good-bye to Will at the front door, Harriet and Evelyn, though they’d be on the train together next day, still pattered in talk, as women do; but I went on, and crossing the Peases’ lawn came upon Edgar Semple. He was standing hands in pockets under the starlight, doing nothing detectable; so I asked him if he indulged a farewell reverie.

“Guess so,” he said. “You see, Irvie and I won’t be coming back in the autumn. We’ll be stopping at Princeton on our way from Stonehaven and we won’t see this old place again until the Christmas holidays. I always hate to leave here and I was just getting a picture of the house in the dark—and the bright light of the windows—fixed in my mind. It’s always been such a happy place that when I’m away I like to think of exactly how it looks in the night-time as well as by day and in all sorts of weather—in sunshine or when it’s rained on, and when the leaves are out and when they aren’t.”

“I live but I don’t learn,” I informed him. “I’ve been gullible in crediting the slogan that for the new generation everything sentimental is both extinct and abhorrent.” Then I added, “I haven’t yet thanked you for the pleasure you gave me the other night.”

“The pleasure I——” He didn’t know what I meant. “What night?”

“Good heavens, *the* night! What you did for Irvie’s play.”

“What I did?” He was still a blank.

“Certainly. Not only your acting, which was the best present; but your contribution to the play itself—the changed soliloquy at the end, the altered version you made.”

“I?” I could see that he was startled. “Look here, where’d you get an idea I had anything to do with it?”

“Partly from the author himself, Edgar. He talked to me about it when he was doubtful of it and planning to use his own version; but I also heard him telling old Sam Johnson Wilboyd that you ought to have a good part of the credit for the change.”

“He did?” Edgar’s tone wasn’t one of pleasure; he was annoyed. “Irvie oughtn’t to’ve done that.”

“I rather thought he ought—and more, too.”

“No, sir!” The boy was emphatic. “When people feel they have to go around giving credit to more than one person for anything that goes off well, it gets all messed up and

nobody knows what's what. It's a nuisance."

"I don't think you need worry," I said. "I seem to be the only person who really understands what you did for the play, and I haven't thought it my affair to mention it."

"I'm certainly glad to hear so!"

"Why?" I asked. "Don't you like being praised?"

"I wouldn't be," he said, with some impatience because of having to explain so simple a thing. "All it'd do'd be to dwindle the acclaim for Irvie a little and spoil what I get out of it, myself."

"What do you get out of it, Edgar?"

Again he seemed bothered by having to clarify the obvious. "What do I get out of it? Why, don't you see? Irvie and I can't both be popular figures. I'm not built that way; but he is. He was born to shine; it's always tickled me to death that he was—and just think what it means to Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Will! So if sometimes I can stew up some way for him to shine even brighter, why, that's what I like doing. I can't shine, myself; it's a sort of special gift that he's got and I haven't. He shines no matter what he does. Well, if I can add a little to that sometimes—and for such a lovable guy, the best friend I've got—and he gets the fun out of it he does and——"

With a palms outward gesture instead of more words, Edgar put the matter up to me to understand, and I wonderingly thought I did understand it. "So Irvie gets a whole lot of fun out of his shining, does he?"

There came a rare sound through the darkness—something most unusual from Edgar Semple—a chuckle, a fond one. "Doesn't he, though! What he gets out of being a celebrity! He's always been something of one in a way—you know, among our crowd and around through the neighborhood and family connection—but now, after those pictures in the paper and the rest of it, he's a celebrity all over town. People he doesn't know have begun staring at him on the street—sometimes even from across the street."

"Have they indeed?"

"Oh, certainly! I've seen 'em do it and of course so's Irvie. When it happens he does a little acting for 'em—nothing much, just speaking in a deeper voice and dropping his hand on my shoulder maybe, or walking a little differently. You could hardly tell it; but it's there and he certainly does love it some. So do I, and where's the harm?"

"Nowhere that I can see." I laughed. "You're sure, are you, that you'll never want any credit for whatever ideas of yours Irvie may take up?"

"Good heavens, no!" Then Edgar laughed, too. "The last thing on earth I'd ever want to do'd be to horn in on Irvie's glory. If life's a game it seems to me I'm the kind that plays it safe."

"Play it, Edgar? You admit you do play it?"

"No, I don't think so," he said. "It just *is* that way. What I mean, if I'd fall down on anything or'd make a fool of myself it wouldn't matter a great deal because it wouldn't be a really bad disappointment for anybody. I'd be no fallen idol and maybe I could pick myself up again without people's even noticing I'd been down. Standing on a pinnacle, though—that's a ticklish position."

“Irvie’s pinnacle, you mean, Edgar? You think that’s a dangerous——”

“No, no, not really, sir. He’ll stay up there of course. He’s safe, because we all want him to be and would do anything on earth not to let him fall off. Happily he has that effect on everybody. No one could bear it if he ever did a Humpty Dumpty and——” Edgar stopped himself; Harriet, crossing the lawn, was beside us.

“Why, Edgar Semple!” she exclaimed. “Aren’t you going to Mary Reame’s good-bye party for Irvie and Emma and you? Emma and Irvie went quite a while ago.”

“Golly, did they?” He seemed surprised, as he turned away. “Then I’d better hop along, I suppose. Goodnight.”

“That was nice of him,” Harriet said, when he was at a distance and we’d begun to walk toward our own house. “He wasn’t surprised; he only pretended to be. He’s very tactful about not pushing in when Emma has a chance to go anywhere with Irvie. Edgar’s often quite a really thoughtful sort of boy, don’t you think?”

Harriet was a kind woman; but, like Emma, and indeed like the rest of the Millerwoods and Peases, she seldom showed much interest in what Edgar was. She’d spared, now, only the one incidental thought to him, for, pausing as we reached the stone steps of the portico before our front door, she revealed what was on her mind these days.

“I can’t tell you how glad I am that we’re getting off to-morrow,” she said. “You’re so absent-minded when you’re working on anything I don’t believe you really see things. I don’t suppose you’ve noticed how little Emma’s been eating ever since the night of the play?”

“I have, though, Harriet.”

“Even you! Then indeed it’s a good thing we’re going. Emma’s at a sensitive age; she seems to worry over—over all sorts of things. She needs a change of scene. Having a lot of different people about her’ll be a great help, too. So will the sea and the air from the pine woods. She mustn’t begin getting thinner.”

## Chapter 9

STONEHAVEN was indeed a “change of scene”, and the “different people” gave us a contrast equal to the landscape’s. In that sea-breezy spot, the Pease family and Harriet and Emma and I were not, as at home, looked upon as established elements vital to the place. At the Stonehaven Inn we’d spent summers numerous enough to be regarded as possibly worthy tributaries; but families who’d been cottage-dwellers for two or three generations couldn’t always prevent themselves from displaying a shade of condescension in their friendliness toward us and our fellow-sojourners at the Inn.

One of us, however, received no condescension from anybody; the rather he dispensed it. Cottagers, “natives” and Inn guests alike treated the much-invited Irvie as the principal young gentleman of the place—mainly, I thought, because he looked it. The rest of us bore our various little exclusions well and enjoyed our compensations. The Stonehaven Inn looked as inn-like as possible, set a knowingly savory table, and from its verandah and terraces offered the most magnificent view of sea and harbor and surf-beleaguered rocky islets within the gift of this stretch of coast.

The beach, not one of the Norsemen’s “long beaches” but a short deep lunette of fine sand, bordered landward by wild grass stretching back to bayberry, juniper and thicketed groves of pine, was no more than ten minutes’ walk from the Inn. I took that walk most mornings, although nowadays I seldom went into the surf, those white surges being too briskly iced from the north for the sedentary who’ve not kept themselves robust after fifty. Harriet and Evelyn went with me; but usually abandoned me there; they were still sprightly enough to love sporting in cold seas. I’d walk a while, shell-hunting at the water’s varying edges; then I’d sit alone, or with non-bathing acquaintances near the bath-houses, and watch the classic spectacle—figures like nudes in sunlit action flying over the sand or at play in long green watery hollows that engulfed them with bubbling crystal.

Most of the time, naturally, I watched our own young people and their playfellows. Emma was a born intimate of the sea, an easy-going water-witch in it or on it. She out-swam and out-dived all of the other girls and most of the boys, too. In an impromptu half-mile swimming-race she’d come in second to Irvie Pease—which reminded me of what she always did at tennis. On the beach Irvie was of course a decorative figure; but in this he sometimes had competition, especially from one of his and Edgar’s summer friends, a youth all too appropriately named Prettiman. If John Bunyan had seen this sample of comeliness and had put it in a book, surely he’d have named it “Mr. Prettyman”.

When the squadron of young would come up out of the sea, frolicking or passing “medicine balls”, I sometimes suspected Irvie of knowing that he looked beautiful and of perhaps attitudinizing undetectably; but his friend George Prettiman could never be accused of any self-consciousness at all. He was too simple, too unimaginative and too

lazy; though I think that in this time of his youth he was the handsomest person I ever saw.

I spoke of him to Evelyn one morning when she'd "gone in" with Harriet but had come out soon and lay beside me for a sun-bath on the sand. "George Prettiman's a remarkable boy, Evelyn. Usually a young gentleman so beauteous would get satirical treatment from his male contemporaries and sometimes from the girls, too. They're likely to plaster him with nicknames referring to his symmetry. Good thing for Antinoüs that he didn't live to-day, he'd have been made miserable; but George seems to get along with everybody. Both Irvie and Edgar appear to like him. They genuinely do, don't they?"

"Yes, indeed," she said. "Everybody does. Maybe it's because he's so much more than good-natured that he's really spinelessly gentle." She laughed. "The boys say he'll do anything anybody tells him to. Yes, they all like him, especially Janey Blue, I believe."

"Janey Blue? Which one is Janey Blue?"

Evelyn sat up straight and shaded her eyes with a hand. "She's a tall sandy-haired girl, even taller than Emma—almost too tall. There she is, just now passing that big rubber ball to Emma. She and George are supposed to be engaged, Irvie says."

I watched Emma receive the ball from the tall sandy-haired girl and instantly, with a competent, long-armed swing, send it on to Irvie. "Are they old enough?" I asked. "Aren't all of that gamboling little troupe a lot too young to be thinking of betrothals and marriage?"

"Murder, no!" Evelyn had sunk back upon the sand and didn't open her closed eyes. "I'm afraid you've reached the time of life when you don't see these differences; they all look the same age to you. George Prettiman's two or three years older than our own boys. He flunked out at Harvard year before last, and since then he hasn't done anything at all except go to Pinehurst in the winter and come here in the summer."

"That makes him eligible for marriage, Evelyn?"

"Why not? He'll never do anything else especially, and Janey Blue's never been able to look away from him since the first time she ever saw him. She's old enough, too. Twenty, the same age as our dear Mary Reame."

"Mary Reame?" I was surprised. "Mary's twenty?"

"Almost twenty-one." I saw that although Evelyn still didn't open her eyes her face showed some amusement. "Mary Reame and Janey graduated in June last year from that New York 'finishing school' Mary went to. Mary's coming on here, by the way, to visit Janey later in the summer. She's to spend a week with Janey and then another week with that Stelling girl who went to the same school and's visited Mary once or twice out home. You didn't know Mary's coming?"

"I believe I'd heard so." I looked toward the water where Emma and Irvie together, forgetting the "medicine ball", were running again to dive through the curve of a wave, and were followed hand-in-hand by the superb George with his tall Janey. "I hadn't realized, though, that Mary's so fully 'marriageable'."

Evelyn sat up again, opened her eyes and gave me a glance in which I saw her amusement increase. "I've always heard," she said, "that it's the most customary thing in the world for a boy to think he's a little in love with a girl at least a shade older than

himself. Mary Reame's a darling creature and so far as I can judge she reciprocates—who wouldn't?—but she'd hardly be able to wait through two more years of college and then four of law school, would she? I don't think any of us need to begin worrying about that, need we?"

"No," I said, "not about that."

Irvie, interrupting a gallop to the bath-house to dress, paused beside his mother and me. Dripping and laughing, he looked down on us and it was easy to see why he drew the gaze of beach spectators more than did the sumptuous George Prettiman. Wet or dry, Irvie always had the "something" that singled him out. "Water too cold for you to-day, Mother?" he asked. "I saw you streaking out like a scared greyhound after one dip." He spoke to me jocosely. "How's your darling old 'One o'Clock' running this season? Had as many breakdowns as you did last year? Had to be towed in lately? Run into any whales off shore? Aren't you ever going to invite me again to go out with you?"

"Oh, come any day, any day, Irving."

He laughed loudly. "That means no day, doesn't it? I may fool you and take you up before the season's over, though—go out with you and spoil your fishing! Might bring a girl or so with me to make sure of it." Then he danced away to the bath-house.

. . . The "One o'Clock" was a shabby old twenty-eight-foot fishing-boat; but that wasn't her intended name. Orion Clafley, her elderly builder and owner, though his appearance and conversation wouldn't have led anyone to suspect a streak of fantasy, had named her "HOURI", not anticipating what facetiousness would make of that word once he'd painted it in large white capital letters on her black stern. Stonehaven villagers, readily mistaking the final letter "I" of "HOURI" for the figure "1", thought "Hour One" a perplexing name for any boat; then received Orion's increasingly irritated explanations hilariously. The name "HOURI" still appeared defiantly upon her stern; but for fifteen years this incongruously rather tubby craft had been gayly known to "natives" and summer residents alike as the "One o'Clock". I'd hired her, season after season, and Orion with her.

I was a mild fisherman, not an ardent one. Many an afternoon the "One o'Clock" merely dawdled at sea without a line over the side and Orion sat by the chuggy two-cylinder engine in the stern, humoring it while I did indolent steering forward, content with our eight miles an hour of "cruising speed". Commonly we had no passengers. Harriet abhorred boats and Emma preferred her own rather dangerous sailing-dory. I didn't like that dory; but Emma was often miles from shore in it alone, especially after Mary Reame's arrival at Stonehaven to visit Janey Blue. When from the "One o'Clock" I'd see the dory's small grey patch of sail in the distance I'd head for it and hover near; then, when we were on land again, Emma'd reproach me pettishly for being an old hen; but next day, to make up for her temper, she'd perhaps be gentle and go out with Orion and me.

Lacking Orion Clafley, I couldn't get out in the old tub, myself, so trifling a motor-boatman was I. Near middle age when gasoline locomotion arrived, I had never any faith that I could master the intricacies of a marine engine. Anybody can learn to steer a boat; but of all men on earth I suppose I am the poorest mechanic; so when Orion Clafley lay

flat with stomach trouble for a week, the “One o’Clock” only swung about her mooring in the harbor, idle, until Edgar Semple volunteered to be my temporary engineer.

By that time August had come and Will Pease heartily with it. Nobody had a more zestful delight in the place than his, and, though he devoted his days to the golf course and the beach, he seemed never tired enough to go to bed. He loved walking at night along the coast, following ankle-twisting paths through scratching bushes and over stony hillocks, or he would badger me into going by starlight to sit with him upon rocky juts into the sea. There he’d quote whole passages or salt phrases out of maritime poems all the way from Tudor ballads to Masfield; but I think there was never a night when he didn’t at least end by talking of his son. His voice always had a little change of tone when he spoke of Irvie, as if now he came to something happily confidential.

“I wonder if you noticed the boy at dinner this evening?” he thus said one night, when the incoming tide’s flying spume had driven us from the rocks and we began to make our way back to the Inn. “Did you happen to observe that he was just as jolly as usual, teasing his mother about her fear of getting stung by a jellyfish at the beach, and all that? You didn’t see any difference in him, did you?”

“No, none at all.”

“I thought not.” We’d reached the boardwalk that runs beside the road leading to the Inn, and in an access of intimate friendliness Will took my arm. “You may be glad to know what a good sport the boy is. He’s had a bad little disappointment to-day. His mother and I are pretty tickled over the way he not only kept it dark but didn’t show his feelings. No, sir—not by the blink of an eye! That agent turned him down; but nobody’d guess it from Irvie.”

“Agent?” I’d forgotten. “How did——”

“You know,” Will said. “Irvie’s play. That agent he sent it to kept it all these weeks; but to-day Irvie had a letter from him. All it said was that except the end of the play showed promise, the material seemed time-worn and the agent didn’t feel that he could encourage himself enough to submit it to a manager, so he was returning it to the author. Well, after all that praise and publicity for the play at home, it must have been a pretty hard jolt to get such a letter, mustn’t it?”

“I’m afraid so, Will. You say Irving ‘kept it dark?’”

“Yes, from everybody, and of course we’ll never speak of it to him. The typewritten manuscript was in a big envelope; but the letter was separate. The desk clerk at the Inn handed Evelyn this afternoon’s mail for the four of us and she opened the smaller envelope by mistake. The flap wasn’t even sealed. When she saw the letter was from the agent she just couldn’t help reading it; then she put it back in the envelope and had the clerk put the manuscript and the letter back in Irvie’s box, so he’d get it when he came in. We didn’t see him till dinnertime, and at first we were both afraid to look at him; but he certainly took it like a good sport, don’t you think?”

“Yes, Will, certainly.”

Will became even more confidential. “In the long run, though, this literary set-back might be a good thing, wouldn’t you think?”

That surprised me into a stupid question. “You don’t mean, do you, Will, that you and Evelyn feel Irvie’s always been so much on the top of the wave that he needs a few setbacks to——”

“No, no, no, never!” Will dismissed the idea instantly. “If anything, he’s too modest about himself already. What I mean is that while this agent’s letter sounded officious and opinionated, as Evelyn repeated it to me, it might help Irvie to have no regrets about choosing the law for his life work. Anyhow, though, that nasty letter must have been a blow.” Will’s paternal sympathy put a tremble into his voice. “If—if he were your boy wouldn’t you feel rather proud of the way he’s taking it?”

## Chapter 10

I DID think Irvie's gameness a credit to him and I said so the next afternoon to Edgar Semple. We were out in the "One o'Clock", flopping into a heavy southerly chop that kept me mopping the spray from my face; the old boat was notoriously "wet". Emma was with us, to make up for an uncommonly sharp scolding she'd given me the day before when I'd closely followed her dory all the way back to the harbor mouth. Just now she was in the stern, hauling in a useless trolling line, and Edgar had come forward to the little cabin for a tarpaulin to shelter the engine and keep the spark-plugs dry.

"Irvie's not letting anybody see the wolf gnaw his vitals," I said. "Plucky of him. Is he going to send his script to another agent?"

"Sir?" Edgar, unfolding his tarpaulin as he emerged from the tiny companionway, paused beside my steering-wheel. "Another agent? Why, he's still waiting to hear from the one he did send it to."

"He hasn't told even you?" My surprise was genuine; I hadn't meant to give Irvie away. "I supposed of course——"

Edgar was shrewd. "Oh, I see! Got the script back, has he? I hadn't any doubt it would be that way; but I thought when it happened he'd keep it to himself—just let it ride until people forgot about it, or if somebody'd ask him he'd laugh and say something like, 'Oh, that old thing? I decided to suppress it long ago, put it away among the follies of my youth.' Something like that—just sliding over it. That'd be Irvie's way and a pretty good one, too. I can't imagine his telling anybody about it now—last of all Aunt Evelyn or Uncle Will. So how did you happen to——"

I explained, and Edgar laughed sympathetically. "Poor old Irvie! Well, he'll keep it dark and so'll we. If he thinks nobody knows, he won't really mind much. He had his fun out of it at home and he's having too good a time here." Edgar glanced at Emma's back; she was busy with her wet trolling line, the chop was noisy and she couldn't have heard us. "No need to mention it—to anybody—is there, sir?"

"No, Edgar."

He went aft with his tarpaulin and I thought of what he'd said of "Irvie's way" and its being a pretty good one. Maybe it was—for Irvie. To hide our defeats, sliding them down to the cellars of our consciousness so that our public appearances shine forth to even ourselves as wholly undented—more of us than is suspected follow this solacing way. So long as the show window's kept triumphantly bright and enticing, this kind of shopman can be content and feel that he prospers. Edgar evidently thought it not only a good way but the best way, for Irvie, and as usual would devote himself to keeping it smooth.

. . . The "One o'Clock" was making heavy weather of it, and, after receiving several

simultaneous quarts of salt water upon my already dripping front, I put the boat about and headed for the harbor with a following sea pushing us along in a sudden smallness of sound. The engine no longer needed the protection of the tarpaulin; Edgar let it drop and I could hear him debating a nautical question with Emma. We were towing the “One o’clock’s” tender, a flat-bottomed small rowboat without which I never put to sea, and the argument concerned this precaution.

“Suppose we’d spring a plank or your old gas tank got on fire,” I heard Emma say. “In a chop as heavy as this the three of us’d have a fine time in that shallow-draft little ten-foot dinghy! We’d have to head straight into the chop of course and that peanut shell’d do nothing but take in water over the bow and fill up. So there you’d be, having to swim for it!”

“Of course you would,” Edgar returned. “You wouldn’t have much chance if you headed into such a chop as this; but you could be all right if you put the dinghy’s stern to it.”

“Edgar Semple!” Emma shouted her derision. “Everybody knows that the only possible way to ride out a blow is to keep heading into the sea.”

“Not in a little rowboat like that dinghy,” he said. “Rowing with your back to the bow, you can’t see what’s coming or at what angle it’ll hit you. Put your stern to the waves, though, and you do see what’s coming at you and if you’re a sharp enough oarsman you can keep squared to it. A rowboat can go with the sea when it can’t go against it. Maybe you’ll have to bail some; but that way you’ll ride it out. Put your bow to it and you’ll swamp.”

“You’re absolutely wrong!” Emma cried. “Ask anybody.”

“That’s the poorest way to settle anything, Emma—asking anybody. It’s better to ask somebody that knows.”

“What a quibble!” Emma laughed at him. “When you’re beaten in argument you always do that, Edgar.”

“Always, Emma?”

“Never knew you not to!”

“Glad to hear it,” Edgar said. “I must be on the right track—going to be a lawyer.”

“Yes, and how judge and juries’ll hate you! You’d never give up the least little point.”

“No, not if it’s the right one, Emma.”

“Or the wrong one!” she said, and they laughed together merrily, much to my pleasure.

When we’d left the “One o’Clock” at her harbor mooring and had rowed ashore in the dinghy, the two skipped away from me and ran ahead. Irvie was having a small “tea-party or something” at the Inn for Mary Reame, and Emma and Edgar feared to be late. I followed, a long way behind, and had a glimpse of Irvie’s party as I crossed the lounge on my way to the elevator. The double doors of a smaller room stood open and through the aperture there came the full sound of a piano and a manly young tenor voice singing “My Apple Blossom, You”.

I saw Irvie at the piano and Mary Reame leaning upon it, as she had in his play. Irvie’s

gay charm was out in full force; he knew dozens of songs, adroitly alternated the frolicsome with the sentimentalized, and, tinkling semblances of accompaniment out of a piano, he could—as his mother laughingly said—woo the bird off the tree. Mary Reame, I thought, seemed ready to leave her bough for Irvie.

Emma and Edgar weren't in sight from where I momentarily paused; but I could see the spectacularly handsome George Prettiman upon a sofa, seated beside his tall Janey Blue, who seemed to feel that Irvie's music was all about George. Her hand stole to touch his and he received this sketch of a caress with amiable complacency. To that somehow rather touching picture of an "engaged young couple" the moody-looking girl at the other end of their sofa offered a radical contrast.

I'd seen her at the beach sometimes and recalled that Evelyn Pease had spoken of her as "that Stelling girl", also that Miss Stelling had visited Mary Reame at home—and another recollection came faintly. Her name was Sylvia Stelling, wasn't it?—and wasn't it she for whom Irvie Pease, at sixteen or so, had cut his cigarettes in two with a pair of scissors? . . . Small and dark, she was what's called "insignificant-looking"; but though she sat with downcast eyes I had the impression that she'd usually be discontented and yet feel, with an odd kind of sulkiness, that she was important. She remained immobile as, in the moment of my pausing, Irvie finished "My Apple Blossom, You" and instantly swung into a carol of nonsense about the Sons of the Prophet and Abdullah Bulbul Ameer. There was a burst of joy, and Irvie's voice was joined in the song by a dozen others but not by that of the girl at the end of the sofa. Her moody expression was unchanged; she didn't move, didn't even look up.

For reasons not fathomed, the mental snapshot I had of her as she sat detached, not succumbing to Irvie's voice or to anything else, came intermittently before me as I changed my salted clothes. I was curious enough to speak of her at our two-family table in the Inn's dining-room.

"All of you seemed to be having yourselves a time at Irvie's party," I said to Emma, who sat beside me. "All of you, that is, except one. I happened to glance through the doorway and it struck me that there was a Banquo at the feast."

Emma understood but quickly looked reticent, an expression familiar to me when she disapproved of a colleague and wouldn't admit it. Irvie, across the table, was amused. "Means Sylvia Stelling," he explained to the others. "She's like that most of the time lately. Just dead pan. My guess is it's because she was beginning to have her eye on poor old George but Janey jumped in first and collared him. Whoever was first would get him of course; he wouldn't know what was happening. Old George's really the 'girl who never could say no'."

Evelyn looked displeased. "That's nonsense, Irvie. None of those Stellings could care for anything except themselves, especially not that suppressed little Sylvia. She's always been queer as queer and I don't see how a girl like Mary Reame can bear to be visiting there. I used to think Mary fastidious in choosing her friends; but——"

"She is!" Emma spoke up quickly in loyal championage. "Mary's just as fastidious as she ever was; she's perfect! They were at school together, Aunt Evelyn, and visited each other several times when they were young." This brought a laugh from the rest of the table, and Emma explained herself. "I mean before they came out. Mary's finished the

week she promised Janey at the Blues' cottage and she couldn't decently turn Sylvia's invitation down for the next week at the Stellings', could she?"

"Perhaps not," Evelyn said. "I just don't see, though, how any civilized person could live a week in that cottage—that atrocious mansion!"

I thought Evelyn right about the "atrocious mansion". The Stellings had built it, not long since, upon an ostentatious hilltop two or three miles away from both the sea and the village. I'd never been nearer it than the stone-pillared entrance to its long asphalt driveway; but what could be seen of an Italianate balustraded roof, above pointed pines, had struck me as discomfiting in the northern New England landscape. Moreover, there'd been a rumor that Mrs. Stelling had instructed her architect to erect for her "a nice summer cottage that'll be a replica of the Dowager Queen's palace in Rome". No doubt slanderous, this artful bit had nevertheless a Stelling flavor.

Mrs. Stelling's husband, as he was usually mentioned rather than as "Mr. Stelling", was an emaciated dreamy man with pale auburn hair, and he was believed to have been selected by Mrs. Stelling because of a fancy she'd taken to his ancestry, a ticket she might at times have occasion to use. His interest in life appeared to rest upon his stamp collecting. I'd never seen him except at the beach; but whenever we happened to come near each other there he seemed convinced, in his misty way, that I was a fellow-collector. Possibly he thought that at my age nobody would wish to be anything else, and, as he didn't listen to my vague responses, his harmless illusion continued from one season to another.

"You'll be interested to learn," he'd say in his suppressed voice, "that I'm now negotiating for nine of the rarest items out of the Sykes-Smythe estate in London."

Mr. Stelling's suppressedness was easily recognized as a condition produced by his marriage to a bird of overwhelmingly different feather, much too gorgeous plumage. With her loose pink face, over-dressed hair and big aggressive head mounted neckless though pearled upon a ballooning bosom, she reminded me of Marie de' Medici in surfeited middle age. At the beach, where only I saw her, Mrs. Stelling's infrequent appearances seemed to bedizen the very sand and her querulous small eyes to challenge the right of the surf to make all that noise when she was speaking. At her "atrocious mansion" she gave sumptuously oppressive entertainments, and Evelyn and Will Pease, after attending one of them, returned as quickly to the Inn as they respectably could. Will had a kind of horror of the Stellings' style of living, and Evelyn more than shared it.

. . . "Those people!" she said to-night at our dinner-table, after I'd brought up the subject of the Stellings' daughter. "One or two more such families, with their liveries and champagne and dozen cars, not to speak of Roman palaces, would be the ruin of quiet old unfashionable Stonehaven. I don't see what they ever wanted to come here for anyhow. They——"

"Oh, see here now," Irvie interposed. "They had a right to, didn't they? If you want to know the reason, though, Mother, it's because Mrs. Stelling's hay fever is better here. You can't blame her for that, can you? Besides, take her on the right side and she's quite a jolly old thing. I don't see anything wrong in her living the way she likes to if she can afford it, and she certainly can. Thirty millions! Boy!"

Will Pease spoke in troubled surprise. "You're joking, aren't you, Irvie?"

“Ain’t I always?” the cheerful youth responded. “Thirty millions isn’t just a guess, though. Bill Tropp in my class has an old uncle in New York who’s one of the trustees or what-you-may-call-’ems of the estate Mrs. Stelling’s father left, and Bill told me. Bill says it’s all honest money, too; her father made three blades of grass grow where one grew before. So what’s wrong about it?”

“Nothing at all,” Will said. “Your mother and I aren’t envy-shouters, Irvie. We’re not accusing anybody of wickedness and corruption. It’s only the rubbing-in of riches that makes us join revolutionaries that deplore vulgarity.”

“Speech!” Edgar Semple looked up from his plate. “That was a good beginning, Uncle Will. You said it! Speech!”

“You eat your lobster,” Will said crossly, and an amiable buzz of family laughter seemed to end our discussion of the Stellings; but I renewed it.

“You used the word ‘suppressed’ about the daughter,” I said to Evelyn. “With such limitless resources at hand what suppresses Sylvia?”

“Her mother,” Evelyn replied. “Her obnoxious mother. Look at the woman’s husband—all he dares is to walk in his sleep whispering about his old stamp collection. She couldn’t endure having a daughter grow up to take part of the show away from her. She never allows Sylvia an hour’s freedom. She’d keep her still in the nursery if she could; she’s even stingy with her. Nobody ever hears Sylvia’s voice when her mother’s around. I don’t mean I like the girl. That brooding makes her most unattractive; but anybody could see where it comes from. What a family! I’m certainly not prejudiced but I——”

“Oh, no!” Irvie gave his mother a pat on the back. “Not a bit prejudiced. Not an iota!” Evelyn was delighted to have him mock her, and this time the family laughter did end our table-talk about the Stellings.

Irvie paired with me in our little procession from the dining-room to the lounge. “Want to be a hospitable old Sea Cap’n?” he said. “Mary Reame’s been here over a week and in the sea plenty but not once on it. She’d like to get out in a boat but not in that tippy dory of Emma’s—she says she’s sure Emma’ll be drowned in it some day—and the Stellings keep their yacht in Florida. If you’re going out again in the ‘One o’Clock’ any time before Mary leaves——”

“Why, of course, Irving. To-morrow afternoon if you like. Edgar’s going with me again; he’s still my engineer. We’ll leave just after lunch.”

“Good enough!” Irvie said. “Emma’ll come, too, of course. Mother said for me to ask Mary to dine with us here at the Inn to-morrow evening, so both invitations’ll have to include Sylvia. I’m lunching at the Stellings’ to-morrow and I’ll have the pair of ’em at your little old pier by two o’clock. Kindly arrange sweet weather.”

## Chapter 11

EMMA and Edgar were already aboard the “One o’Clock”, and, as I rowed Irvie and his smiling, delicate Mary out in the dinghy, he explained why Sylvia Stelling hadn’t come.

“Her mamma wouldn’t let her. Maybe she would have; but at lunch she heard me prattling and asked what on earth was the ‘One o’Clock’. When I told her it was a fishing-boat you hired she screeched. Said anybody that went out in such craft always smelled of fish for hours, especially in hot weather. If Sylvia went she mightn’t get back in time to be de-fished and dressed for the five-o’clock party at the Blues’ cottage; it wouldn’t do at all. Mrs. Stelling said she had no authority over a ‘house-guest’—yes, that’s what she called Mary, a ‘house-guest’; it’s Mrs. Stelling’s style—so Mary could go and smell herself up if she wanted to.”

Mary laughed. “Tell him the rest of it, Irving.”

He complied. “Mrs. Stelling didn’t worry over whether I’m sensitive or not about being a mere worm of a hotel guest. She said Sylvia couldn’t come to dinner with us, either. She’d allowed her to join my tea-party yesterday, me being such a nice persuasive feller, but no—not for dining. Said she’d always thought it ‘rather cheapening’ for a girl ‘in Sylvia’s position’ to be seen too often around summer hotels. Whoops, what a tactful old gal, and whoof, where’d all this heat come from? I’m sizzling in all my seams. Do hurry and get us out of the harbor and upon the rolling blue.”

This was indeed the hottest day in many Stonehaven seasons. Outside the harbor we were not upon a “rolling blue” but upon a dulled glassy surface lazily humped by the subsided chop of the previous afternoon and without horizons. A yellowish haze, thinner than fog but almost as palpable, removed all blues and greens from sky and sea, and before we’d made a full sea-mile from the harbor we were out of sight of land. Our only breeze, the slight one afforded by our eight-miles-an-hour, wasn’t cooling. Our faces and hands seemed the hotter for it, and I didn’t ask if anybody’d care to make the exertion of fishing.

Mary Reame, often called a “sweet girl”, was really so. She said she was enchanted to be on the sea and thought the effect of the haze, with the sun so faint one could stare at it, beautifully Turneresque. “I’m not used to the water, like the rest of you,” she added. “I’m much more entirely a mid-west inlander because I’ve never spent a whole season by the ocean and the only time I ever really saw anything of it at all was going to Europe and coming back, that summer the family took me over. I don’t mind it’s being so hot; I feel exhilarated to be out here on this boundlessness. Don’t you see how like a Turner it is, Irving?”

“Oh, I do!” he responded in a lover’s huskily softened voice; but I heard him. “It’s

beautiful to see it as you do, Mary—ah, and for us to feel it together!”

Emma, too, heard this, since she was standing beside me near the wheel; but, if she flinched, the emotional jerk wasn't perceptible. Mary Reame and Irvie didn't care who saw that they were in love and Emma had made up her mind and her heart to show them and everybody else never anything but brightest approval. At this very moment, when the romantic condition of her two dearest friends became most apparent, she was probably imagining herself as a bridesmaid parading a stout smile down the length of a church aisle at the end of which, before a flowered altar, Irvie awaited his lovely slender bride.

. . . I'd run the "One o'Clock" on a slanting south-easterly course out from shore for about an hour and a half; then I called Emma to the wheel—she'd gone aft to chat with Edgar by the engine—and, when she'd relieved me of steering, I went down into the little box of a cabin and brought forth some sandwiches and a couple of thermos bottles of iced tea.

Mary Reame made the correct chirpings over this hospitality, asked what could be more divine, a question Irvie no doubt rightly interpreted as meaning what could be more divine than to sit beside him enjoying common refreshment on the boundless deep. Then she pointed to the west. "It's getting more and more Turneresque over in that direction. These sulphurous tones that tint the air seem to be deeper in color yonder. What's there, Irving?"

"Nothing except Porpoise Cove, Bristol Beach, Miller's Neck, a string of summer hotels, summer shacks and a couple of lighthouses," he told her. "That's the land, Mary, about seven miles off our starboard quarter—only you can't see it. You could if this hot haze'd clear up; but it isn't going to, so you'll have to be content with the Atlantic Ocean and present company—which strikingly includes me. Can you stand it?"

Mary gave him a look that openly proved to us all how happily she could stand it.

Edgar accepted a glass of iced tea and showed me his watch. "Twenty after three," he said. "About twelve miles out, aren't we? Emma and Mary and Irvie and I are supposed to be at the Blues' cottage by five—announcement party for Janey and George Prettiman. I'd rather stay out in the boat, myself; but the others——"

"All right, Edgar. I'll head for home."

When I'd taken the wheel from Emma, I put about, watched the compass, and for a little less than an hour held a straight course for Stonehaven's harbor mouth. Then, from foot to head, I had a too-familiar sensation—that of losing personal momentum. For some moments the "One o'Clock" continued to move spinelessly and without propulsion; then lay lazily aflop: once again that senile engine had broken down. Emma, beside me, looked round at Edgar.

"Hi there, Engineer! Get out your monkey-wrench and see how long you're going to hold us up."

Edgar didn't respond. He was down on his hands and knees, absorbedly busy, and a suggestive smell of gasoline unpleasantly drifted forward to us.

"Get going, Edgar," Irvie said. "We'll be due at the Blues' pretty soon. It's after four. How could there be any announcement party without Janey's school roommate? Mary's got to get there. Hurry it up!"

Edgar still didn't answer. He'd opened a hatch in the floor-boarding and was working with his head and an arm beneath the aperture. Irvie didn't ask if he needed help, possibly because he knew Edgar's competence, but became more urgent. "Hi, get a move on, feller! I want to be at that party, myself."

Edgar rose, wiping his monkey-wrench with a clump of cotton waste, which he tossed overboard. "Take it easy," he said, and called to me. "Feed pipe from the gas tank to the engine, sir. I was afraid the vibration'd crack that old pipe some day."

"Crack it?" Irvie spoke imperiously. "Bandage it up with something, then, and let's get going."

"It isn't cracked," Edgar said. "It's broken right in two. I've got the gas turned off all right; but until we get a new feed pipe from Clafley's shop the 'One o'Clock' is out of commission. We'll have to get a tow."

Mary Reame murmured, "Oh, dear!" and Irvie exclaimed, "A tow, the devil!" He jumped up from his chair beside Mary's. "Who's going to see us in this haze?"

I brought a megaphone and a pair of binoculars from the cabin; all of us searched the thin yellow-filtered sunshine for a chance Samaritan. The binoculars didn't help us much, the air was too thick, and of course the megaphone was only a hopeful gesture until a friendly boat should appear. Mary Reame tried to hide her anxiety not to miss the announcement party; Irvie fretted, and the misconduct of the "One o'Clock" seemed to put upon the poor old boat, and me too, an air of stubborn but conscious guilt.

We'd lain helpless for perhaps twenty minutes when an encouraging sound became faintly audible—the throbbing of a marine engine. Irvie mounted the cabin-roof and began to bellow through the megaphone, "Ahoy there, you! Boat ahoy! Give us a tow, will you?" and presently a whitish streak appeared on the water half a mile or more to the eastward—recognizably a motorboat cruising along the coast.

Emma had the binoculars. "No use shouting, Irvie," she said. "They couldn't possibly hear you. They ought to notice we're not making headway; but they're not stopping yet. Keep waving, Edgar."

In token of distress Edgar was widely waving the small flag we carried on the "One o'clock's" stern, and for a moment the white streak to the east seemed to become clearer. Irvie jumped down from the cabin. "Joy, oh, joy! They're turning toward us and'll give us our tow. Cheer up, Mary, we're practically at Janey Blue's right now."

"No, we aren't," Edgar said. "They aren't heading for us. If they saw us at all they probably thought we're just lying here fishing. They're moving right along, cruising down east."

"Oh, no! They couldn't!" Mary cried; but Edgar was right, and with a general groan we saw the white streak fade into complete invisibility.

## Chapter 12

MARY REAME, as if she'd missed a train, turned anxiously to Edgar. "How long," she asked, "do we have to wait for another?"

He only looked astonished, but Emma reminded me of an occasion when Orion Clafley and I had broken down and weren't brought in until midnight. "We just thought you were writing in your room, so we didn't miss you until after dinner. On top of that the boat Uncle Will sent out to look for you was hours and hours finding you in the dark. We'd better decide not to mind missing the party, Mary."

"Get practical," Irvie said. "We're not going to miss it. We covered a lot of distance running for home before we broke down; we can't be more than three or four miles out. There's the dinghy. What's the matter with rowing in?"

"A four to five sea-mile row in that dinghy?" Edgar shook his head. "She'd be overloaded, and with one pair of oars it'd take forever."

"The dinghy's got rowlocks for two pairs," Irvie said. "Aren't there a couple more oars stowed away somewhere?"

I apologized. "No. I'm sorry; but Orion needed 'em for another boat and——"

Edgar renewed his objection. "What's the difference? Five people in that boat——"

"I didn't say five people!" Irvie protested. "The dinghy's light as a feather, the tide's running in, I'll row the girls ashore and we'll be at that party before it's half over!"

"I wouldn't count on it." Edgar, always cautious, looked serious. "I doubt if you could make it under an hour and a half at the best. I doubt if——"

"Doubt, doubt, doubt! Doubt nothing!" Irvie laughed and unfastened the dinghy's painter from the "One o'clock's" stern. "I'll telephone the village from the Blues' and have a motorboat sent out for you two; they'll easily tow you home in time for dinner. How's that for an executive brain? Always trust the seafaring Old Maestro. Come on, ladies mine!" As he spoke, he pulled the dinghy alongside, stepped lightly into it and seated himself amidship at the oars. "Forward the Light Brigade!" he cried. "Mary, sit in the stern; it's more comfortable and my weight throws aft when I row. Emma in the bow seat'll trim the boat just right. On with the dance!"

Mary smiled upon him but was timid. "Such a little boat. Is it safe?"

"As a church, my child!"

Irvie gave her his hand as she stepped over the "One o'Clock's" side and let herself down upon the dinghy's stern seat. Emma, following Irvie instantly, was already sitting in the bow between the unused oarlocks. With a strong stroke he began to pull away from the "One o'Clock".

“ ‘Pull for the shore, sailor!’ ” he blithely sang. “ ‘Pull for the——’ ”

“Wait a second!” Edgar had groped in a locker and brought forth a tin can in which he’d kept screws, nuts and bolts. He emptied these out and tossed the can to Emma. “Catch! You might ship a little water before you get in and need something to bail with.”

Emma laughed as she caught the can, and Irvie mockingly called as he bent to his oars, “Man the pumps, men! A leak, a leak, a leak! ‘ ‘We are lost,’ ” the Captain shouted as he staggered down the stair.’ ” Then he began to sing again, “ ‘Pull for the shore, sailor! Pull for the shore——’ ”

Already a decisive space of satiny water showed between the “One o’Clock” and the dinghy, and Emma, in the little boat’s bow and facing us, was waving her handkerchief in jaunty farewell. I realized that I’d had not a word to say during the swift operation that was separating her from me. Young people often make their decisions, and act upon them, too, so quickly that an unconsulted older person scarce knows what is happening; then stands baffled by the accomplished fact. Irvie’d swept things along almost instantaneously and it was not until after he’d had his way that I became reluctant to let him have it. I could foresee no danger at all—a child’s toy sloop would have been safe upon that breezeless surface—yet, as the watery space between the “One o’Clock” and those three figures in the dinghy became irrevocable, the rowboat seemed pathetically and even ominously little in a vastness of vaporous sea and tinted air.

. . . The burlesque singing of Irvie Pease grew fainter and fainter till it came no more to our ears. The haze dimmed the boat; the three figures merged until there was only a lonely pale dot visible—then it vanished, too.

Edgar had been staring at it with me, silent; but now he coughed, lighted a cigarette and settled himself into one of the small wicker chairs we sported. “Of course they’ll be all right, sir; but I think Irvie’ll feel pretty tired before he gets there. Emma can spell him at the oars, though, and she probably will. She rows quite as well as he does, maybe better, though Irvie wouldn’t think so. I suppose we’d better keep our ears open for a putt-putt if another boat happens along; but that probably won’t be until Irvie stirs one up to come out for us. I don’t see much for us to be doing except sit and wait, do you?”

I laughed, said I didn’t; and sat down beside him. The water made not even a gurgle against the “One o’Clock’s” bow, stern or sides, though at times the hull beneath us heaved a little or sank a little or seemed to sidle gently, as if we rested upon some sluggish great being not wholly pleased to have us there. My eyes were hot. I closed them, felt my head nodding and before long was drowsing in my chair.

Edgar roused me by heaving the anchor overboard. “Thought I might just as well,” he explained, returning from the bow. “Irvie’ll give our location as well as he can to whatever boat comes out for us and we seemed to be drifting some. It could be almost dark by that time and there might be a shower by then, too. I think they’re going to get one ashore before so very long. Wouldn’t you say so?”

I looked to the westward where lay the haze-hidden land and saw a darkening of the sulphurous tint prevailing there all day. “Thunder shower,” I said. “It may hold off, though, and not come on till nine or ten o’clock. I’ve seen it behave that way after one of these yellowish days. About how long has the dinghy been gone, Edgar?”

“They ought to be fairly near Stonehaven Harbor by this time,” he said. “Of course

they'll make it easily before that shower comes across the bay.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” I said. “I’m not worrying about them at all.” Then, staring westward and seeing how swiftly the darkness there was gathering and spreading, I spoke with a sharper gravity than I intended. “Are you?”

“I?” Out of the side of his eye Edgar gave me a glance of startled reproach, as if he thought I wished to alarm him. “Worrying about them? Not in the least. They’re a long way north of us by now and the shower’s coming up straight out of the west. It wouldn’t reach them—at least not until they’re well ashore—but I begin to think we might get it out here, sir. In fact, I’m sure we shall—before long, too. The whole look of things is changing pretty fast.”

“The whole look of things” was indeed changing, and with a rapidity unexampled in my previous experiences on that coast. Filtered sunshine was gone, and, though neither in that westward dark thickening nor anywhere else could we see shape or outline of a cloud, all yellow was brushed out of the air in a moment, and the “shower” advanced upon the sea with lightnings and crashing thunder—thunder that all at once sounded near at hand.

“I’m afraid there’s a lot of wind in it, too,” Edgar said. “It looks like—it looks like quite a squall.”

After that the eruption of nature confronting us encouraged neither of us to speak. For a few more moments only, we lay on a sea turned to black glass; then a great white confluence of water rolled at us out of the west and we were struck by a wind that had already unroofed summer shacks and twisted great branches out of stout old elms ashore. As if under power and being steered, the “One o’Clock”, disregarding her anchor rope, instantly moved round into the trough of the sudden white-topped waves and went into such extremities of violent action that she seemed a creature independently alive and taking a death-struggle into her own hands.

Thrown from my feet and grasping foolishly at overturned chairs, I had one of those freaks of memory that crises sometimes bring, and in my mind’s eye saw old Cap’n Amos Wheeler standing in morning sunshine on the Stonehaven village wharf discussing a bad blow of the preceding night. “No, sir; that wasn’t no squall,” he’d said. “That was a *bolt*. A bolt’s ten times wuss’n a squall. What we got last night was a *bolt*.” That was years ago; Cap’n Amos Wheeler had lain long in his family’s cemetery now; but, sliding on the bucking floor-boards of the “One o’Clock”, I remembered him and knew what he meant by a bolt.

This was one. Gallons of frothy water, too salt in the mouth, flopped upon me as the “One o’Clock” convulsed herself in the short deep trough; then Edgar Semple, on his knees, pulled at my arm till my right hand grasped the upright shaft of the steering-wheel. I got my back to the wall of the cabin and so sat, rollingly, holding to that steel shaft and finding my soul ill prepared for my body’s drowning.

The “One o’Clock” seemed to be the leaping and dodging lonely target of a colossal animosity. Tropical-like lightnings, intolerably bright and discharging simultaneous blasts of thunder, searched for us closer and closer; a water-spout walked in that turmoil, though we were spared seeing it. We saw almost nothing except flying water and those target-hunting flashes—then came crashing rain as tropical as the lightning and we lived within a curtain of it.

Edgar, staggering and caroming, was on his feet; he clutched a cleat on the cabin's roof. My wet and dizzy eyes saw his figure rise above me, drop down and rise again with the contortions of our frightened boat. Not a yard from me, he was shouting at me: "Thank the rain! If it holds for ten minutes like this——" I saw him look upward, addressing the uproarious deluge. "Rain harder! Let's have the best you've got! Pour it down, Old Scout!"

This personification of the prodigious power above and about us, "Old Scout", seemed to reach the mark and Edgar's request to be granted—never had I known such impassioned rain. It did last ten minutes, or more, and was our defender, beating down the vicious deep chop, bringing the "One o'Clock" easement. The valiant old boat still flopped but upon watery hummocks only; the great wind of the bolt passed on, and then the rain, as if satisfied with having done this business for us, thinned the size of its drops, became sparse, gave us a final congratulatory wetting and ceased to be.

I got to my feet and Edgar released his cleat. "Good old 'One o'Clock'!" he said. "What's the reason we didn't crawl into the cabin and keep dry?"

I told him. "We didn't like the idea of being drowned in a box, Edgar."

He shook his head, not in denial but in rueful assent as we looked about us. With unbelievable celerity the bolt had become nothing. In less than half an hour it had come and gone, and now, except for lumpy water, there was no vestige of it. To the eastward, the direction in which it had passed, the cooled air was crystal and everywhere the world lay clear under an after-sunset sky. West and northwest stretched the long thin land, neatly dark blue beyond miles of pale sea; but this silent, abrupt unveiling was strange. No peace came with it.

"Of course——" Edgar began, stopped; then said, "Of course——" again.

"Why, yes, of course!" I spoke out sharply. "They had plenty of time to make it—plenty. They'd at least have been in the harbor before it struck. No doubt in the world they made it safely. They——"

"Yes, they *had* to." Edgar stopped staring landward, picked up the fallen chairs and sat down. "One thing's certain," he said. "Irvie's never cared to be out on the water much; but he's good enough at the oars, he's strong as a horse and he's got plenty of nerve. He wouldn't lose his head; he wouldn't be afraid, and of course Emma wouldn't, either."

"No, never, Edgar."

"We know that much, anyhow," he said. "Of course, though, they made the harbor before the blow. Well—nothing for us to do again except sit and listen to the water running out of the scuppers. We dragged anchor a lot. We must be a long way from where we were when they left us. Now about six or seven miles out, wouldn't you say so, sir?"

"Just about, Edgar. We might have a longer wait than we expected."

He was looking landward again. "I don't care how long we wait to get towed in," he said. "I—I wish somebody'd come and *tell* us, though!"

That haggard wish for somebody to come and tell us—tell us that our flimsy dinghy had reached the harbor before the "bolt" struck—was what we both could have shouted and shouted, while all we did was to sit and wait. Last echoes of sunset left the sky. Faraway tiny sparks were the lights coming out on shore—we sat in darkness and still

nobody came to tell us.

Edgar broke the silence we'd held neither of us knew how long. "Of course there isn't a dry cigarette on board." His voice was hushed and uncertain. "Well, I don't—don't care." From a pocket he took a sodden packet and tossed it into the water where it made a dismal little splash. "There go the last of mine and I didn't want 'em anyhow." Then he rose quickly. "Hello! Do you hear something?" From far away over the water there came through the darkness unmistakably a faint chugging sound, and Edgar's voice was abruptly loud. "By Golly!" he cried. "It's a boat and I'll bet a thousand dollars it's looking for us! It's the boat Irvie said he'd send for us. Everything's going to be all right. By Golly, sir, everything is all right. They got there! I'll give that boat a light to show where we are."

In exuberant relief he dashed into the cabin, brought forth a tin bucket, a big chart-book and a box of dry matches he'd found in a locker. He set the bucket on the roof of the cabin, tore the chart-book into sections and made a bonfire of its pages in the bucket. The flames shone merrily, the chugging grew louder and within five minutes a voice familiar but surprising to me hailed us crossly.

"Hi there! Can't you folks get along without draggin' a sick man out o' bed?"

The voice was Orion Clafley's, and he complained talkatively as he drew nearer. He'd known I'd never be able to take care of myself if anything like a real breeze came up, he declared, and when his wife had told him that "quite a shower" was on the way he'd got up, put on his clothes and borrowed his brother's boat to come out and see why we hadn't had sense enough to go home before we got our feet wet. In fact, all the boats in Stonehaven had come out to look for us—people at the Inn "seemed a mite anxious and runnin' all this way and that, offerin' rewards," Orion said.

"Might a-give up, myself," he added, from a boat's length away, "if you hadn't showed that light. Ain't goin' to tow you in. Take too long. I'll git my nephew, 'Lonzo, to come out and bring the boat in to-morrow morning. That anchor ain't goin' to drag no more to-night. Needn't tell me the engine broke down; knowed you'd let it jest exactly at the wust time in twenty years!" He was now alongside and grasping our gunwale to keep the two boats from rubbing. "Git aboard. I'll run you home quick as I can make it. Your folks's makin' plenty distubbance over you and so's the hull village and everybody else." Then, as Edgar and I clambered over the side and were in his boat, his husky voice changed tone. "Everybody ashore told me there was five o' you. Godfrey Mighty, where's the rest o' you?"

That hour of dark voyage to Stonehaven was the vilest I ever spent in a boat or perhaps anywhere, and I think Edgar Semple would say that same for himself. Orion Clafley tried to be tactful; but his first words after we'd answered his question about the "rest of us" had been impulsive.

"In that dinghy? You *let* 'em?"

How easily Irvie's sunny confidence had made us let them! What had my indecision and ignorance done to myself—and ah, to my sister and to my best friends, Will and Evelyn, and to the father and mother of Mary Reame!

All along the shore, near Stonehaven and half-encircling the harbor, we saw, as we came closer, a multitude of twin brilliancies—the headlights of so many automobiles that there was a glare upon the water and all through the air above it. Orion Clafley, long silent at his steering-wheel, explained this with a saturnine grunt.

“Gathered from nigh and fur. Motored from all round about, they have. Think maybe they’ll git a chance to see your bodies brought in.” Then, as we passed the bar at the harbor mouth, he shaded his eyes with a hand. “Boat goin’ in some way ahead of us. It’s the ‘Flora Smith’, my nephew ‘Lonzo’s. He come out when I did but turned off t’ the eastud. Headin’ in fer that little pier o’ yourn. Lot o’ people on it and down on your float, too. Likely headin’ in to tell ‘em he couldn’t find nothin’.” Orion paused, staring ahead; then he said, “Hey, listen! What’s that noise? Sounds like cheerin’. You don’t suppose \_\_\_\_\_”

We ourselves were in strong light now; but ‘Lonzo Clafley’s boat, two hundred yards ahead of us, was in stronger, and we saw him lay his craft alongside the float at the water end of the short pier. Against the glare we saw heart-liftingly more—three silhouetted figures that rose up from the boat, stepped out upon the float and were enfolded by other figures crowding upon them. There was no question about the cheering now; it came hysterically from the float, from the pier and from the adjacent shores.

“By Godfrey!” Orion Clafley said. “This coast ain’t had such a bolt in twenty years, and if that young Irvie Pease has brought that dinghy through it alive he’s done somethin’ nobody could believe and there ain’t a seafarin’ man in Stonehaven that’d claim he could done it, himself. Yes, and by Godfrey there’s the dinghy tied on behind ‘Lonzo’s boat. By Godfrey Mighty that young Irvie Pease *has* done it!”

We came to the float and with unintended irony we, too, were cheered; but the glory was all Irvie’s. George Prettiman and the other young people from Janey Blue’s party, shouting, were lifting him upon their shoulders. Will Pease, choking and half-weeping, seized upon Edgar and me, an arm about each of us.

“That boy of mine! He brought ‘em through! They’d blown miles eastward; but when Alonzo picked ‘em up they’d come through the storm, it was all over and Irvie was rowing for shore. Oh, I tell you—that boy of mine! That boy of mine!”

Emma threw her arms about my neck and kissed me; but Mary Reame was clinging to Harriet and seemed upon the point of collapse. At her resilient age and a very climax of romance—imminent deadly peril and saved by her lover—she should have been radiant; but hers was the only stricken figure in that illumined tumult of rejoicing.

Emma ran back to her and with Harriet helped her up the gangway from the float to the pier. Ahead of us we saw Irvie’s laughing face on high, as he protested against being carried the whole length of the pier on the shoulders of his jubilant young friends—and I’d have liked to be one of them. Will, pushing along beside me, clutching my arm, was still murmuring, “That boy of mine!”

Irvie Pease was a hero again.

## Chapter 13

AT the Inn, Josiah Labrosse, our landlord, had a late hot dinner waiting for us in the smaller room off the large dining-room, and, when we shipwrecked five had changed our clothes, four of us sat down to it with Harriet and Will and Evelyn. Irvie was delayed, even in the doorway, by exclaiming people not till then able to reach him, beam upon him and shake his hand.

“Good Lord!” he said, laughing as he took his place between his mother and father. “You might think I was Columbus or the boy that stood on the burning deck whence all but him had fled. All I did was what I simply had to—or else! Ha! That lobster stew looks good. I’ll to it, hearties; I’ll to it!”

I was glad to be more pleased with him than ever I’d been, especially with his making light of what he’d done. “What I simply had to—or else.” His father, scarce able to eat for pride and joy, couldn’t let it pass.

“Don’t try to minimize it, boy,” Will said. “You’ve shown the stuff you’re made of and everybody knows it.”

Evelyn, still shaky and ready to shed more tears of relief, couldn’t restrain herself. “Oh, when we saw that white wall of water coming across the bay and the horrible blackness above it! We knew you were out there in it—but didn’t dream you were in that eggshell; we thought at least you were in the bigger boat—and oh, you weren’t! and yet you fought it and came through and saved yourself and—and saved these two dear girls——” She flung an arm about Irvie’s neck and kissed him on the cheek. “Oh, you darling bravest of the brave!”

“Stop it!” Irvie protested. “You’re making me spill lobster stew all over the tablecloth.”

The rest of us, ready to laugh at nothing, did laugh at that—all except one, Mary Reame. She’d put on a pretty evening dress, brought with her to the Inn that afternoon when she’d arrived for the boating party. Patterned in apple blossoms, that slim dress seemed now a touching reference to the song Irvie Pease had so often sung to her. Emma, sitting next to her, straight and strong, looked exalted. Her eyes were bright and her chin was up; but Mary’s wasn’t and she didn’t let anybody see her eyes. The range of her gaze included only her plate and the tablecloth near it, and when she spoke, which was almost not at all, it wasn’t in a “natural” voice. She made motions with a spoon or fork; she didn’t eat.

I heard Emma murmuring to her. “Stop it! Brace up and eat something. Why isn’t everything all right? Don’t be this way!”

Mary’s response was little better than a whisper. “Yes—yes, I know. Don’t bother

about me.”

Edgar spoke up briskly: “The old ‘One o’Clock’ didn’t behave too badly, after all. She did shoot us right spang into the trough, though. You won’t believe it, Emma, but even during a whale of a ducking I was thinking of that argument of yours.”

Emma didn’t respond; it was Will Pease who asked, “What argument?”

Edgar looked placidly at my niece. “You don’t mind my rubbing it in, do you, Emma?” Then he answered Will’s question. “Up to to-day she’s been insisting that if you were out in a boat like that dinghy and got caught in a blow you’d head her straight into wind and sea. I told her no, you’d put her stern to the waves and go with ’em or you’d swamp. She wouldn’t give in.”

“Maybe because she was right,” Will said. “I don’t know anything about boats, myself; but couldn’t she——”

“No, sir; and she knows better now. I’m just doing a gloat over her, Uncle Will, because she’s had a pretty eye-opening object lesson. When that sea struck him if Irvie hadn’t known enough to put the dinghy’s stern to it and run with it—well, I don’t care to dwell on horrors that didn’t happen; but if Irvie hadn’t done exactly that we wouldn’t be having this jolly little dinner-party in celebration, and Emma knows it.”

Will and Evelyn didn’t care whether Edgar won his argument or not; all they saw in it was more laurel for Irvie. Evelyn kissed him again and Will patted him on the back. “By George!” the glowing father exclaimed. “The more we learn of what you did this day, my boy, the more we marvel over you! The presence of mind and the knowing exactly what to do——”

“Oh, see here!” Irvie said. “How about dropping all this? As a matter of fact, I didn’t do it all. Mary did a tremendous job of bailing with that tin can Edgar threw on board—I think we’d have sunk if she hadn’t—and I even let Emma spell me a while at the oars and ——”

“Yes, yes; you hardly did a thing, yourself!” the delighted Will exclaimed. “Just for once you might as well cut out the modesty; we all know better. I wish you’d heard what those waterfront people were saying about it. Even old fishermen who’ve been out in a thousand blows, themselves!”

Harriet added her testimony. “Even that old curmudgeon, Orion Clafley himself. I heard him shouting to somebody out in the harbor that Irvie Pease ought to have a medal!”

“Forget it!” Irvie said. “We all did our best, and what’s it matter who gets the credit? Let’s talk about something else.”

“You’re wrong,” Emma said, speaking suddenly and loudly. “We none of us want to stop talking about you, so why should we? When people feel that somebody’s done a grand thing he ought to accept it and just be glad they do.”

“Bravo, Emma!” Will Pease cried. “Why, Irvie, the Stonehaven children of the next generation will hear their fathers tell the story of this storm and how Irving Pease, only a summer visitor and an inland boy at that, saved——”

“Oh, well——” Irvie interrupted, and, apparently in spite of himself, seemed to find the prediction rather gratifying. “No matter what people make of it or what they choose to

say of me, the truth's simply that we had luck. Luck was all there was to it."

At this, Mary Reame did look up. It was the slightest quickest flicker of a glance; but for that half second she looked toward Irvie and then looked down again. "At least drink your coffee!" I heard Emma urging her, and Mary clinked her spoon against the cup but didn't drink.

She wasn't fully in Irvie's view: Emma, sitting forward, seemed to shelter her, and Irvie, busy with eating and talking, was almost surrounded, as it were, by his affectionate mother and father. Certainly he hadn't observed Mary's exhaustion—for, when we left the table and went toward the populous general living-room of the Inn, he skipped gayly forward and took her by the arm.

"Hi, old lady dearest——" he began, and then as, not looking at him, she drooped closely against Emma, "Why, Mary!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord, don't you know it's all over and here we all are again, safe and sound, the same as ever? What on earth's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'm all right."

"But you look——"

He wasn't permitted to finish telling her how she looked. As we came through the lounge door he was seized upon, made the center of a group of all ages crowding upon him with more congratulations, more enthusiasm and a dozen half-shouted questions at once: How had he done what he did, what had he felt while he was doing it, did he realize himself how remarkable was his exploit, were the girls too frightened to help, and was it true, as some shore-watchers claimed, that there'd been a water-spout in the storm? Will, Evelyn and Harriet, as happy parents of off-spring saved magically from the sea, were also surrounded and detached from the rest of us. Mary, with Emma's arm about her, turned to Edgar.

"Please," she said weakly, "will you telephone to Janey Blue for me? She's got her own car and I'd like her to come as soon as she can and get me."

"But, Mary!" Emma began hurried remonstrances. "Wouldn't I do almost as well as Janey? Next to her you'd say I'm your best friend, wouldn't you? If you'd just let me \_\_\_\_\_"

"Emma, I've got to be out of this crowd."

"Then come up to my room," Emma said. "You can lie down there until it's time for you to go back to the Stellings' cottage. You could——"

"No, I don't want to go back to the Stellings' till I have to; I don't want to have to talk to Mrs. Stelling, or Sylvia either, to-night. I don't——"

"But, Mary, up in my room——"

"I just can't stay here." Mary fought with her nerves. "I've got to get away or I'll make an exhibition of myself. Please thank Mr. and Mrs. Pease and tell them and your mother good-bye for me." She turned to me and put forth a little ice-cold hand, which I took with some astonishment. "Thank you for asking me out in your boat. I probably won't see you again until you come home in the autumn, so good-bye."

"What do you mean, good-bye?" Emma spoke sharply. "We'll all be seeing you to-

morrow, of course. You've only half finished your week at the Stellings'."

"No," Mary said. "I telephoned the station from your room while you were taking our wet clothes down to dry. Please send mine home to me if you don't mind. The station got me a reservation and I'm leaving on the early train to-morrow morning. Edgar, if you'll please telephone Janey pretty quickly——"

"I don't need to," he told her. "Josiah Labrosse lets me use a car of his when I want it and it's parked on the Inn driveway just outside. If you think you've got to get to Janey ——"

"Yes, I do. She'll take me back to the Stellings' later. So please——"

"Come right along," Edgar said in a casual tone, though he was staring at her hard. He turned immediately, went out to the long verandah, down its steps and disappeared.

Mary followed, still with Emma's arm about her, and I stepped ahead of them to open the screen doors. Nobody appeared to notice us, and, before we knew that our movement had attracted any attention, the three of us stood upon the lighted verandah, waiting for Edgar to bring the car to the foot of its steps. Then Irvie came forth, but not unattended. A girl in her early 'teens and three little boys pushed after him, all of them pressing upon him with extended fountain-pens.

"Just a minute, just a minute!" he begged them, laughing. "I can't sign 'em all at once, can I?" He spoke to us cheerfully. "What's doing out here? It's cold after that blow and if Mary's still feeling so languid she'd better come sit with me by that nice log fire at the other end of the lounge. Come along, Mary; I'll get rid of these autograph fiends and ——"

"No," Mary said, moving away from him, with Emma, to the edge of the steps. "I'm going to Janey's for a while before I go back to the Stellings'."

"You are?" He was surprised; then seemed to comprehend. "I see. You still feel pretty shaken and it's too noisy here. All right; we'll go over to Janey's and have a nice quiet time there, dear. Just wait till I borrow a car and I'll——"

"No," Mary said again. "Edgar's got one; I'm going with him."

"But you——" Irvie began. "Why, what——"

It was then he realized that she hadn't looked at him, wouldn't look at him. He was astounded, wholly perplexed; stood staring at her.

"Good-bye," Mary said in a whispered gasp and moved uncertainly down the steps.

Emma and I went with her. Edgar had just stopped a shabby old sedan for her on the driveway below and jumped out; he opened the rear door of the car before I could extend my hand to it. Irvie came half way down the steps, but halted abruptly, and the powerful light of the porte-cochère lantern was full upon his face. Jolted by a lover's rebuff, unable to understand the cause of it, and not yet quite sure that he was receiving it, he spoke brusquely.

"See here! If you really mean you don't want me to come with you——"

"No," Mary said, her foot on the running-board, "I don't."

"Oh, very well!" Irvie looked haughty and in his voice was the resentment natural to a lover now certain that he was being badly treated for no reason. "Then I won't!"

Mary, her back to him, stepped half way into the car; but suddenly she turned, stepped down and we saw tears copious in her eyes. She threw both arms about Emma, who stood silent and all at once seemed to me mysteriously dramatic. “You grand thing!” Mary cried huskily to her. “Don’t think I’ll ever forget how magnificent you were—and are!”

Then Mary almost leaped into the car, not needing either Edgar’s hand or mine to help her. A moment later, as Edgar jumped in and drove away, she seemed to be sitting almost doubled up on the back seat.

Emma’d gone before I turned back to the steps; but the ’teen-age girl and the three little boys were again assailing Irvie, clamoring for his autograph. I passed him without looking at him.

## Chapter 14

EDGAR found me in the writing-room when he came back to the Inn. No one else was there and he sat down, waiting for me to finish my letter. I put it aside. “You delivered her to Janey all right?”

“All right?” he repeated. “I couldn’t say just that. Janey and George Prettiman were wandering about the lawn; but when I got Mary out of the car, pretty crumpled, they came running up and Janey took her right in the house. George said he guessed Janey wouldn’t be out again and wanted to know what it was all about. Naturally I couldn’t tell him.”

“No, Edgar; naturally you couldn’t.”

“Because I didn’t know,” Edgar said, and shook his head ruefully. “I drove back here by the Pine Woods Road and I saw Irvie but didn’t let him know I did and drove on. He’s just rambling around in the dark wondering what happened. Uncle Will and Aunt Evelyn think he’s skipped out to avoid more acclaim; but that isn’t like him. Besides Mary herself, who do you think knows what did happen, sir?”

“Emma does,” I said. “Maybe she even knows what Mary meant by calling her ‘magnificent’. Of course girls in emotion do say these things to each other.”

“Golly, yes,” he assented. “Who knows what they mean by ’em? But whatever Emma knows, she won’t tell. She’ll never tell. There’s Janey Blue—she probably knows by this time, in confidence, because that’s why Mary wanted to get to her. She had to talk to somebody and it couldn’t be Emma.”

I agreed. “No, it couldn’t be Emma.”

“No,” he said. “It couldn’t because what Mary wanted to talk about was something that’d changed her toward Irvie, and she knew Emma’d fight that.”

“Yes, Edgar.”

“The way I see it,” he said, “Mary didn’t want to talk to Sylvia about it—she doesn’t like her enough—so the only person she could go to was Janey, her old school roommate, and she’s telling Janey all about it right now. All about what? Why, about whatever happened that’s changed her toward Irvie. Well, what did?”

“I wasn’t present when it happened,” I reminded him. “The strange thing, though, is that one of the three persons who were present didn’t foresee this result. That’s Irvie. He did something Mary found so painful that she can’t bear the sight of him to-night—leaving on the morning train and may never wish to see him again—yet even when he came out on the verandah as she was leaving he hadn’t seen that she was changed toward him. Queer, isn’t it?”

“Well—no.” Edgar gave me a look that was itself rather queer. Though he didn’t

smile, the usual calm of his expression was altered by a humorous desperation as if he had to speak out and say something he didn't wish to say, an unwilling confession. "You know, sir, the honest God's truth is"—the words seemed to burst from him—"Irvie's clever about a lot of things; but he just isn't too darned awfully bright!"

I stared at Edgar. "You've always thought that, haven't you?"

"Oh, in a way," he admitted, with a sound like a groan. "I mean he—he thinks about himself a good deal and that stops anybody from thinking much about other people. When Irvie doesn't have the kind of effect on them that he likes he—well, he wouldn't dwell on it much. He rather thinks that everything he does and says is pretty much all right, you see, and if they didn't think so he'd just be surprised and puzzled and hurt, the way he is to-night, for instance. Whatever he did that upset Mary, he'd minimize it, think it amounted to practically just nothing at all, wonder why it made her treat him as she did and of course he'd bury it. If I spoke of it to him, for instance, he'd say he didn't know what I was talking about and pretty soon he actually wouldn't." Edgar frowned; then laughed. "Anyhow, I know there's one thing that didn't happen."

"What's that, Edgar?"

"I'm afraid it's the very thing you think most probably did," he said. "That out in the little boat Irvie got scared and showed it and that his behaving badly in that way is what changed Mary's feeling about him. Isn't it what you suspect?"

"If I do, Edgar, it's because I can't think of anything else that could possibly——"

"But it's *not* possible!" His emphasis was earnest. "It's the simplest explanation of course and the first that'd occur to anybody; but Irvie's playing the coward is one thing that positively could not have happened. I don't think anybody knows him better than I do, and the one thing I'm certain of is that he wasn't scared. In his whole life I've never known him to be physically afraid of anything. Have you, sir?"

"No, not that I remember."

"Nor that anybody else remembers," Edgar said with conviction. "I've seen him when he ought to've been scared and when everybody else was—but not Irvie. That time when Uncle Will took Irvie and me out west we did some hill climbing and there wasn't anything Irvie wouldn't tackle. He got himself and me into places, 'way up the side of a canyon, where it didn't look as if we could ever either go up or down another inch and I was scared to death; but all Irvie did was joke about it and go on risking his neck till we wormed our way out. Really, he enjoys being in danger."

"Because it's a chance for glory?" I asked. "Or maybe because he couldn't imagine the worst's happening to himself, he's so sure he has a destiny?"

"Maybe a shade of both, sir; but what I'm insisting upon is that whatever happened out in that dinghy, it wasn't Irvie's showing the white feather. You can dismiss that impossibility from your mind."

"Very well," I said, convinced that he was right. "Then we're left in the dark."

"Yes, and may stay so," he assented. "Irvie'll let this be the end of it. Almost anybody else would write to Mary and demand explanations; but not he. He doesn't like 'em. He never cares to go much into things, especially when they mayn't be pleasant about himself. If somebody doesn't like him, or changes from liking him, he doesn't care to hear

why. He won't follow this up. By to-morrow he'll have settled it, so far as he's concerned, and just be saying to himself, 'Oh, well, that's the way some girls are, you never know what they'll do, so forget it.' He'll want the whole business to slide off and be forgotten."

"But, Edgar, he's seemed to me pretty much in love and——"

"Yes, he was," Edgar said. "I mean was. That's the way he is."

He knew his Irvie, and if Irvie had received a blow it left no bruise visible to the eye; whatever hurt he'd had he took no long time to dispose of it in his own way, for at the beach next morning he was as much his blithe untarnished self as ever I saw him. I was near him when a group of his young friends, boys and girls, came running up to him, calling to know why Mary Reame had left Stonehaven so unexpectedly: Was somebody in her family ill at home, was she sick, herself, after that awful storm, and of course he'd gone to the station to see her off, hadn't he?

"No, nothing's the matter with her or anybody else," he answered cheerfully. "She's perfectly all right—just thought it's getting near the end of the season and she'd better be hopping home. No, I didn't see her off at the station; I overslept. Where's that medicine ball?"

Will and Evelyn and Harriet, just out of the bath-houses, were intercepted on their way to the surf; more people wanted to exclaim over yesterday's adventure. Standing nearby, I was aware of a vague presence at my elbow and a thin voice addressing me.

"It may interest you to know," Mr. Stelling said, "I've just received information of an old warehouse in Philadelphia where some remarkable discoveries have been made. Great stacks of letters dating from as much as a hundred years ago and never before examined have yielded astonishing finds. Three unique stamps not previously suspected of being still in existence were——" He broke off the sentence to murmur, "Dear me! What's my wife saying to those people?"

Wide, pink and aggressive, Mrs. Stelling had borne down on Will and Evelyn, pushing their friends aside, and was speaking querulously in her overfed, half-choked voice. "Mrs. Pease, will you kindly inform me what sort of bringing-up girls get from their mothers in those prairie towns out where you people live? When I let Sylvia go out there to visit this girl some years ago I think I must have been crazy! Such manners as——"

"Oh, look here, Mother!" Sylvia had followed Mrs. Stelling and made an annoyed attempt to interpose. "Since she was my visitor, not yours, and I didn't care tuppence whether she stayed or went home, why the hullabaloo?"

"'Hullabaloo'?" Mrs. Stelling turned upon her. "Nice word to use to your mother! Not my visitor? Anybody who visits in my house is my visitor and when I've invited any house-guest for a week they're supposed to stay out that week and not go getting my servants up for an untimely breakfast and ordering a car of mine out for a train, disturbing my whole household. You go take a walk with your father somewhere and don't interfere with me when I'm expressing my opinion of Miss Mary Reame to the people responsible for her lack of manners."

At this, Evelyn Pease laughed outright. "Where'd you get that idea, Mrs. Stelling?"

"Aren't you?" Mrs. Stelling was more offended than disconcerted. "Aren't you her

aunts or uncles or something? You're all from the same town, aren't you? Besides, isn't she engaged to your son?"

Evelyn laughed again, merrily. "Not the least in the world, Mrs. Stelling," she said, and seized Will's hand. "Come, let's get into the surf!" Taking her willing husband with her—he was laughing, too—she dashed by Mrs. Stelling and went splashing into the sea.

I heard Sylvia speaking sullenly to her mother. "Hadn't you better begin listening to me sometimes if you don't want your blood pressure to——" and Mrs. Stelling responding imperiously, "That's enough from you, Sylvia!"

Sylvia said, "Oh, all right!" and looked cowed as she walked moodily away.

Mr. Stelling was no longer near me, and the outlines of his figure, as he faded himself into the distance, were expressive of nothing but overwhelmed retreat. Harriet hadn't followed Will and Evelyn; she hurried to me, took me by the arm and led me away from listeners. "Wasn't it lovely to see Evelyn put that awful, awful woman in her place!" she said, as a prelude. "Now I want to know what you think Emma has on her mind."

"Have you asked her?"

"No, she won't let me even ask her and I've learned to know when it's of no use to try. She puts a tensity about her, looks like a young priestess, sacrificial and exalted. She wouldn't come to the beach, went out in her dory again and I know I'll never, never get anything from her about what she's thinking."

"No, you probably won't."

"She's odd sometimes, even to me," Harriet said. "Of course I agree with Will and Evelyn about Mary Reame. She got so upset by her fright that she had to get home to her mother, and they're rather pleased about it because they believe it'll disrupt any little affair that may have got started between her and Irvie. They like Mary, of course; but they've never felt that either spiritually or intellectually she'd ever be anywhere up to Irvie, and this proves it. Well——" Harriet mused for a moment; then smiled as if upon a thought somewhat secret but one that brought her a noteworthy satisfaction. "Well—in the end it might turn out most decidedly for the best."

These mothers! From a daughter's birth they'll plan a bridegroom for her, though for a son many of them will hope that there'll never be a bride. For years Harriet's hope for her daughter and the darling cousin named for the loved husband had been the persistently guiding motive. The way to the cherished end wasn't clear, of course, and that culmination was a long way ahead; but at least one obstacle, poor gentle Mary, had removed itself. Harriet didn't see any mystery in the removal and neither did Irvie's pleased parents; but the evening of that day ironically deepened the mystification of two observers. Edgar Semple must have felt both the irony and the mystification at least as keenly as I did.

The dinner menu cards upon all the Inn's tables had a typewritten slip attached to them:

*Farewell Hop Tonite, last of the season, but before the music, all guests of the Stonehaven Inn are invited by the Selectmen of this Town to take seats in the Inn's ballroom to witness a brief ceremony. The Stonehaven Inn cordially seconds this*

*invitation.*

*Respectfully*  
JOSIAH LABROSSE.

“What in the world’s all this about the Selectmen?” Irvie asked the rest of us at our table; but he looked self-conscious, and later it seemed probable that he’d been forewarned and already knew the answer. However, when we joined our fellow-guests in the ballroom, he made himself only a member of the audience and went with Emma and Edgar to join George Prettiman and Janey Blue and sit expectantly.

The big room was comfortably filled; young people had come from the cottages for the “Hop”, and to the general surprise there were “native” faces here and there while behind a table at one end of the room stood not only the three Selectmen of Stonehaven in Sunday black but a group of fishermen trying to look unaware of being in their best clothes. Orion and Alonzo Clafley and all the male members of the widespread Clafley family connection were there, a solemn delegation behind the Selectmen. Stalwart John Clafley Wade, the Head Selectman, had brought a gavel with him and he used it upon the table, rapping for order.

“Mr. Irving Millerwood Pease,” he said, “will kindly step forward.”

“Why, what——” Irvie said loudly, apparently dumfounded; then he rose, and, wearing an air of humorous puzzlement, walked forth into the open space between the audience and the delegation of local authorities.

The Head Selectman addressed him with dignity. “Mr. Pease, the chosen representatives of the people of this town have taken this opportunity to meet with as many of our summer residents as may be here present in order to acknowledge a debt. During all the years that Stonehaven has entertained summer visitors there has never been a single accident or casualty that has proved fatal to any of Stonehaven’s summer guests, and Stonehaven is proud of the record. Last evening, as you all know, an unusual squall arose and except for your coolness and seamanship, Mr. Pease, there would in our judgment have been a triple drowning. Thanks to you, such did not occur and Stonehaven’s record for its care of our summer visitors wasn’t smirched by a tragedy. The Selectmen of this town have prepared a citation honoring you for this deed.” Here Mr. Wade extended the written citation to Irvie. “Please accept it accompanied by the goodwill and admiration of all citizens of this our good town of Stonehaven.”

As Irvie took the paper, and hand-clapping grew loud, I saw Emma’s face illumined as by a maternal happiness. She was the first to jump to her feet to emphasize an applause that became louder and louder. In a moment the rest of us were standing, too, and that whole wing of the Inn resounded with an approval that almost shook its walls. Herein was the irony and the mystery: What had Irvie Pease done in the half hour that brought him this glorifying ovation and cost him his sweetheart?

## Chapter 15

A MYSTERY is a mystery to only those who puzzle themselves with it, so this was one to only Edgar and me. Probably we both guessed the right answer often enough when our later speculations reverted to Mary Reame's calling Emma "magnificent"; but we were to wait a long time for certainty of solution, and when it came it didn't matter much. Stonehaven already looked dustily autumnal; Will and Evelyn went down with their two boys to Princeton; Harriet and I left Emma at Bryn Mawr and returned to a house that was lifeless without her. For us, as for our next neighbors, too, that whole area of the city felt blank, lacking the three young people whose daily doings so absorbed us and seemed to give us most of our reason for living. No wonder the old birds begin to lose interest in the nest when the young ones are preparing themselves to fly.

Except for the interlude of the Christmas holidays we had a dull winter, though on a February afternoon Harriet came in from one of her woman's club meetings bringing a bit of gossip to which for once I listened. Mary Reame was engaged to Frederick Charles Carhart, that affluent youngish widower-about-town, and Mary's mother, in strictest confidence, had admitted it here and there.

"It'll be a large church wedding late in June," Harriet said benevolently. "He's very well off and a friend of the Reame family and everybody says Mary looks very, very happy. I don't see how she could, seeing what she's losing. Emma'll be home in time to be a bridesmaid; but I do hope they won't ask Irvie to be an usher."

"Why shouldn't he be, Harriet?"

She reproved me. "You don't see it would be asking too much of him—after the way she treated him and how he must have suffered?"

"He did? He suffered?"

"What!" she exclaimed. "You didn't see how bravely he covered it up?"

That was the legend Harriet had by this time established with herself; the ladies love these romantic vapors. Fled from hysterically by a notional girl who hadn't known her own mind, Irvie had so gallantly hidden his wound that only those who knew him best could have guessed that he'd received it. Now he might have to endure playing a part in the ceremony that united her forever to another and he would smile; but the smile would be a spartan's. In spite of the happy fact that everything would probably in time "work out satisfactorily", Irvie during this interval was to be looked upon as martyred by a misplaced love. Worshipful women will go to any length to let their imaginations make for them such a picture.

The actual event of the wedding, however, didn't substantiate this one; Irvie, though he reached home in time, wasn't asked to be an usher. Emma was a bridesmaid; so was

Janey Blue, and, to the astonishment of old-fashioned people like the Peases and Harriet, so was Sylvia Stelling. Harriet, loudly exclamative, brought in this news a week before the wedding. "And her mother not ten days dead!" my sister cried. "Mrs. Reame says Mary thought she simply had to ask Sylvia, so she wrote almost a month ago and did; but she didn't get any answer at all from her till the very day after Mrs. Stelling's funeral. Then Sylvia telegraphed her acceptance. Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"Not that I recall, Harriet."

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "It was even in our papers out here, how Mrs. Stelling collapsed at a dinner she was giving and lived only a few minutes. It was a stroke, and the very next day after the funeral, here was that telegram saying Sylvia'd be delighted—she actually used the word 'delighted'—to accept Mary's invitation. What these young people do nowadays! No respect for anything! They don't care how they shock people. Think what it shows!"

"That Sylvia didn't care much for her mother?" I suggested.

"No, nor for anybody else, nor for what people think of her! Not that I blame her," Harriet continued, "for having no feeling for that spoiled, mannerless woman who lived only to display her self-indulgence and show. There are common decencies, though, and now Sylvia's got her head she begins by proving she has no regard for 'em. Coming out here to be a bridesmaid the very next week after——"

She was interrupted by Evelyn, who with a rush arrived in our downstairs library where Harriet had found me. "Have you heard that Sylvia Stelling——" Evelyn began, and for a time the two produced one of those exclamatory duets in which words become indistinguishable. Evelyn emerged from it with something like a brief solo. "Will's simply aghast. He says if those are modern New York manners he——"

"I can't believe it!" Harriet cried. "It's just that girl! She's freed from her suppressive mother and got her head at last so she——"

"Got her head?" Evelyn interrupted. "I should say she has. You remember Irvie's telling us about the classmate of his whose father was in the Trust Company or something that looked after the Stelling Estate? Irvie had some more about it when he was home at Christmas, did I tell you? Mrs. Stelling had only the income during her lifetime—of course it was huge—the grandfather died just after Sylvia was born and he'd left it all in trust for her, and that was before the inheritance taxes were made so crushing, so Sylvia'll have practically the whole thing. No wonder, with her awful bringing-up—that outrageous mother and that shadow of a father—no wonder she thinks she can do what she pleases and can laugh at anybody who disapproves of her!"

At Mary's wedding Sylvia didn't look like a person who laughs much at anything. She'd arrived in the costliest of foreign cars, one much noticed in even our crowded streets, and she'd brought Janey Blue, the Maid-of-Honor, with her—and also George Prettiman, who complaisantly accompanied his fiancée. Of course during the processions to and from the altar, through stained-glass filterings of afternoon sunshine, my eyes were upon Emma who looked smilingly solemn and now could easily be thought a handsome girl, I was sure; but at both the church and the mulling reception afterward I more than once took account of the sensational heiress. She was already that; publicity had followed her from the moment of her mother's death, and, though the wedding-guests were too

well-bred to stare baldly, their curiosity about her maintained a running whisper on the air.

She must have known it; but she didn't show that she did. Though her expression now seemed rather determined than downcast, it struck me as still having in it a kind of sulkiness. She didn't look at people when she spoke to them, nor did she smile nor in any way become affably responsive; but these reticences were those of long habit and by no means attributable to her bereavement. Without exertion she made the bride a subsidiary figure, and on all sides of me I heard the murmurings.

"Have you seen her? No, not there; she's that rather small darkish one standing talking to Irvie Pease and the out-of-town man that looks absurdly like the Apollo Belvedere." . . . "You don't see the attraction? Not in seventy millions?" . . . "Yes, the very next week after her mother's funeral; but I hear that's the way they do nowadays." . . . "No, not pretty exactly but think of all that power in those small hands." . . . "They say she brought two maids with her in another car." . . . "Yes, I met her but she only said 'How dj do', not another word." . . . "Yes, probably marry somebody as rich as she is—or an Archduke or one of these Georgian Princes." . . . "What's it matter not being a beauty? Haven't you seen those pearls!"

On my way out of the Reames' beflowered living-room, and on my way out of the house, too, if I could make it, I was brought to a halt by Harriet, Evelyn and Ella Martin, who also were speaking of the pearls. "What do you think of it?" Ella asked me. "I mean of her wearing them to a wedding, making all this show with them the very week after she inherited them from her mother."

"Not at all," Evelyn said, though her disapproving amazement wasn't less than Ella's. "Everybody at Stonehaven knew Mrs. Stelling's pearls very well. These aren't the same; they're even finer and larger. They're new ones, I tell you—absolutely. New ones! She's begun to outdo her mother."

The Stelling caravan, only a stirring episode, departed eastward almost as soon as the out-shone bride had thrown her bouquet from the Reames' stairway landing; but it was Sylvia's shocking journey that brought the end of our sea mystery to Edgar and me. At dinner Emma, still gayly in her bridesmaid's dress, had agreed with Harriet wistfully that Irvie had been able to bear the wedding more debonairly than if he'd had to hide the anguish of being an usher. "Of course since he's a Princeton Senior now," our Bryn Mawr Sophomore said, "he has all the self-command he needs. When he congratulated Mary and Mr. Carhart you'd never have dreamed what it cost him or that he wasn't the gayest of the gay. Mother, it was heart-breaking; he seemed almost careless about it!"

Irvie himself proved how right she was about his carelessness. In the twilight Emma and I sat in wicker chairs upon our lawn and he sauntered over from his father's house but declined an invitation to sit with us. "Thanks, no; just on my way to say hello to aunts and uncles I didn't get around to at the reception. Did you both see that car Sylvia and Janey and George piled off in? It wasn't one of the Stonehaven garage outfit of the Stellings'. New. Golly, isn't she going to go it, though!" He uttered a most carefree laugh. "Good old Janey better look out!"

Emma didn't follow this. "Why, Irvie?"

"You haven't got it yet? Didn't I tell you all last summer Sylvia had her eye on

George—if she ever got her chance?”

“But George wouldn’t——”

“George wouldn’t?” Irvie’s tone was one of cheerful mockery. “George would! That poor guy’s so simple he’ll always do what anybody tells him to; it only depends on who’s the last person to tell him.”

“Irvie! He’s not that supine!”

“Then just call it sweetly tractable, Emma. I don’t say old Georgie’s got imagination enough to think up much of what he could do with all that dough; but he has just barely enough of his own to live on in the way he likes. The Blues aren’t too well off. If Georgie marries Janey he’ll have to go to work; but ouch, how could he? Janey’s mother’s practical and she persuaded them to put off their wedding until autumn so that George could get himself established in some business first, and he never will; he’s too helpless. That gives Sylvia plenty of time. Just wait. Well, I’ll be shoving along. I thought Mary made quite a cute little bride, didn’t you?”

With that, he did shove along, swinging gracefully down the sylvan street, and Emma, after devoting a sigh to his bravery, gave a languid greeting to Edgar Semple who’d been hovering on the lawn at a little distance.

He sat down with us but waited for some moments before he spoke. “The remarkable thing about it, Emma,” he said deliberately, “is that you saw what was coming in time to put the dinghy about.”

“What?” she said, staring. “What on earth do you mean? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t you?” He laughed and turned to me. “Of course you must have thought it all out, sir, by this time; but anyhow here it is: Mary told Janey, and Janey couldn’t help telling George of course, and at that reception this afternoon George let it out to me in the most casual way. He forgot all about it’s having been confidential until after he’d told me. We just got to talking about Stonehaven last summer and naturally our big squall came up and Mary’s rushing home by the first train she could get and——”

“Edgar!” Emma’s tone was peremptory. “I don’t care to hear——”

“Yes, I know,” he said apologetically. “Mind, I’m not trying to rub it in that I was right about putting a rowboat’s stern to the sea and running with it; but when you saw that Irvie was heading into the squall and would certainly swamp the boat, and you grabbed the oars out of his hands, slammed them into your oarlocks and put the dinghy about, you must have——”

“That’s my own affair!” Emma’s face was dim to us in the thickened twilight; but the tensivity of her voice and the rigidity of her figure were perceptible as she rose and stalked toward the house. She paused at the steps, called back shakily, “George Prettiman—what a fine authority for such a story! There’s absolutely nothing at all in what he says—or in what you’re saying, either, Edgar Semple!” She let us hear her footsteps sound sharply as she crossed the portico and went into the house.

“Anyhow,” Edgar said reflectively, “that’s what she did and it’s what saved them. Must have been at the last possible instant or she’d never have grabbed the oars from Irvie. Makes the whole thing pretty clear now, doesn’t it?”

“Clear indeed!” We two sat on that midland lawn a thousand miles away and looked upon the same picture of sudden Atlantic fury. We saw the three figures, two girls and a boy, beset by engulfing waters, and we knew that one of the girls had abruptly given up theory for practice. Confronted by the reality of rushing seas, Emma had grasped the truth. We could hear her outcry above the wind and the plunge of waves, “Put the boat about, Irvie! For God’s sake put her about!” and, when he wouldn’t, Emma had done it herself, seizing the oars from him at the last possible instant, as Edgar had said. She’d got the half-filled dinghy about, and, while Mary had frenziedly bailed, Irvie’d sat nonplussed. When the rain came, and the sea fell, Emma’d put the oars back into Irvie’s hands.

“That was it, you see,” Edgar said. “I knew it wasn’t Irvie’s being scared that changed Mary. He wasn’t. It wasn’t his being wrong about heading into the sea, either; though it would have drowned them. She could have forgiven him for that. George was rather vague. He just said Mary was upset because she thought Irvie ought to’ve given Emma the credit for taking the oars when she did; but of course you see how it finished poor old Irvie for Mary.”

“Yes, of course, Edgar.” In Alonzo Clafley’s rescuing boat Irvie, jolly with the rescuer, hadn’t mentioned that it was a girl who saved the dinghy; but it was when Alonzo brought the three to the cheering crowd on the float and pier, and Irvie let himself be hoisted upon high, that Mary’s incredulity became a stricken one. Irvie protested, but jovially and without the instant proclamation of Emma as their savior. Later, at the Inn, when he’d disclaimed credit and said “All I did was what I simply had to—or else!” Mary saw that he’d never be able to deny himself even an unearned laurel. Probably his reference to letting Emma “spell” him at the oars was his most injurious self-revelation. His being able to smudge it all over even to himself like that, and to believe that he’d as easily smudged it over for Mary, too, was what sped her flight from him.

Not Mary, the timid bride of that afternoon, was in our thoughts as we sat in shared silence on the lawn while more and more stars became visible. Not Mary but Emma! There are women who love to the utmost. They do not care what the son or the brother or the husband is or does. For them he has only perfection and yet what they ask is that they may help to cover his imperfection—with glory if they can—and that at any cost they shall help to make him happy. Edgar didn’t need to say he knew this of Emma. What he did say as he rose to leave me after that half-hour of reverie was only, “Well—more power to her!”

## Chapter 16

AT Stonehaven that summer the Blues' cottage was not opened; it bore a "To Let" sign on a shaggier and shaggier lawn throughout the season. Nor was the atrocious mansion of the late Mrs. Stelling inhabited, except by a caretaker. Mr. Stelling had been encouraged to stroll among British philatelists while Sylvia motored in the Canadian Rockies with Janey Blue and George Prettiman. Mr. and Mrs. Blue, it was understood, had hoped to add the rental fee of their cottage to the necessary expenses of a metropolitan wedding; but Stonehaven had an "off season" and they were disappointed.

"They won't need it, though," Irvie said at lunch on the last day of our sojourn at the Inn that year. "How long since you heard from Janey, Emma?"

"Not since July, though I've written her twice since then."

"Coming to a head," he said, surer than ever that he was a prophet. "The Blues'll never be put to that outlay."

"What outlay?" Will Pease asked his son; but, when Irvie explained, Will only laughed. "I'm afraid you're at the age when it seems proper to be cynical about 'girls'. I suppose it's a Senior's privilege. I can't imagine even that peculiar Miss Stelling's doing such a thing to a nice girl like Janey Blue, nor young Prettiman's letting it be done, Irvie."

"I can," Evelyn said with the slight frown that appeared upon her pretty brow whenever Sylvia Stelling was mentioned. "The 'Stelling girl' wouldn't have any compunction about taking anything on earth she wants, no matter from whom she takes it. She's going to spend the rest of her life making up to herself for her mother's treatment of her, and in that sulky way of hers 'the world is mine' is written all over her. As for George Prettiman, heaven help him, didn't you ever notice that weak laugh of his? All he has for both mental and emotional equipment is a kind of sleepy good nature. I shouldn't be at all surprised if Irvie's right and the Stelling girl's decided that what she wants in a husband is beauty—mere somewhat masculine beauty."

"Yay, Mother!" Irvie cried. "Isn't that a bit indelicate? Aren't you turning a trifle too modern for our old-fashioned midland background?"

Evelyn gave him the flattered glance she always had for him when he teased her. "What do you think of it, Emma?" she asked. "Is Irvie right?"

"I don't know. It seems odd, though, Sylvia's taking them on this elaborate trip—I mean Janey's consenting to it. I—I'm afraid I'm sorry for Janey."

We were all sorry for Janey when we next heard of her—except Irvie perhaps, who seemed to take the affair as more or less a joke on all parties concerned; so his mother

reported after a letter of his from Princeton. Emma wrote Harriet from Bryn Mawr she'd heard at last from Janey who'd left Sylvia's motoring party at Banff in October and was on her way home. She'd written on the train. Emma quoted the four stiff sentences of which Janey's letter to her consisted: "You are one of the few friends I feel I should notify that my plans for the future are completely altered. My engagement to George Prettiman is broken. I have no blame for anyone but myself in accepting so much hospitality. I am leaving for home at once."

Emma's written comment was as emotional as if she'd spoken it. "Oh, Mother, Mother! That poor girl's heart is broken. She's never looked at anybody except George and her feeling for him was a blind devotion—the very blindest I ever knew because of course the rest of us all saw what an absolute sap he is; but she never could—just blind, blind, blind! He couldn't help being one, himself, of course, because such entire poverty of intellectual endowment simply can't be improved; but Sylvia doesn't care anything about that. She just wants another ornament like the new pearls she wore at Mary's wedding. So she grabbed the handsomest man in the world—if you like that style—and what did she care if it broke poor Janey's blind heart? Poor, poor blind Janey, she'll never see George as he really was—she'll only mourn his loss the rest of her days. Irvie saw it all coming long before the rest of us could even imagine it. How brilliant and shrewd he is, Mother! I think it was almost supernatural."

Irvie's foresight amazed even his fond father. "You may not see how it applies," Will said to me; "but such insight into the weaknesses of human character, the knowing what results it will bring about when nobody else does, is one of the requisites for becoming a great lawyer."

In fact, Irvie's shrewdness in this sad matter seemed established; but there may have been a step in his reasoning that didn't appear on the surface. He may have felt that almost anybody, even someone with a character far stronger than George Prettiman's, mightn't be able to resist Sylvia Stelling's prodigious affluence, were it offered to him. Irvie may have thought that nobody could.

Sylvia led her captive down into California where they were married with a costly splendor reported, with photographs, even in our local papers; but our own neighborhood hopefully looked upon the incident as closed. "She'll never come back to Stonehaven; it'll be too small a field for her," Evelyn said. "The pine trees'll grow tall enough to hide that absurd palace and we can forget it and her too. We have better things to think about, thank heaven!"

Her particular allusion—the better things to think about—was to the Princeton Commencement of that year. Irvie's graduation, accompanied by Edgar's, was for all the Peases a milestone decorated in carnival colors or at least in those that harmonized with orange and black, and even old Janet Pease, Irvie's great-aunt, went to New Jersey for the celebration. My own occasion to be there was the reunion of my depleted class; but for Emma and Harriet there was a forlorn disappointment. My sister and I drove out to Bryn Mawr to pick up Emma and found her in despair, having been diagnosed in that very hour as afflicted by a severe attack of measles. Harriet stayed with her and I went on to my reunion alone.

Will Pease didn't let me spend much time among my classmates. He immediately seized upon me, carried me off to a "Tea" in Irvie's (and Edgar's) handsome rooms, which were crowded with Peases and nice-looking girls and dressed-up students. In a window-seat I had an agreeable talk with a member of the graduating class whose name I didn't catch, a frank young gentleman who seemed to be a special friend of Edgar Semple's.

"Perhaps you don't know old Edgar picked up a *cum laude*," he said, laughing. "None of these people seem to notice it much, they're all making such a fuss over Irvie Pease. Of course Irvie's done well enough, too; but maybe he wouldn't have if he hadn't roomed with Edgar. He's a popular guy, Irvie, though—got his P on the eleven this year; just barely but he got it—and's been on almost all the dance committees. He was our class president in Freshman year. Oh, yes, he's quite a lad. I hear his graduation thesis has made something of a stir among the Faculty. I have an idea who it was that did most of the groundwork for him, though."

"Your friend Mr. Semple?" I asked.

"Oh, well," he said with a somewhat belated air of reticence. "Of course Irvie'd never have had the patience."

I made an inquiry about this thesis that evening at my own class headquarters. Dr. Philippus Connors was a relic my class had deposited in the Faculty in the Department of English, and now, though about to retire, he still showed sprightly signs of life and he was enthusiastic about Irving Pease's thesis, an astonishing work of research and most excellently written, old Philippus said: "The title didn't allure me, 'On Some of the More Obscure of the Elizabethan Writers'. We get a lot of that, you know, and most of it's flashy stuff, shallow research, just decorated; but when I got into this—Lord, what a difference."

"Surprised you, did it, Philippus?"

"Didn't it, though!" His worn-out eyes almost sparkled. "I hadn't been expecting anything like it from Pease; I saw I'd under-rated him. That youth had been excavating. He'd dug up passages of genuine poetry by Elizabethans, some of 'em little more than names to many pretty good scholars. He'd found things that ought to live. In fact, that thesis is a revelation and we're going to place it in the University Library as a reference work of lasting merit."

More light on that "work of lasting merit", and upon other matters, was shed by the Class Day exercises. Will Pease insisted upon my membership in the "family" for this cheerful ceremonial, and, as I sat in the temporary amphitheatre centered upon the half-buried historic cannon, it was easy to feel that among all those Seniors seated below us, the Peases saw only one. For them of course everything was all about Irvie, and, when one or another of the jocular class orators mentioned his name, Will and Evelyn leaned forward breathless as if they'd never heard it before.

Most of the allusions to members of the class were providentially enigmatic to their families, and, when Will heard his son addressed from the rostrum as "Irvie Pease, King of the New York Night Spots," and the class cheered jocosely, Will laughed heartily, too. "What good fun," he said, "to hear them making a joke of everything for the last time! They'll all be out in the 'wide, wide world' to-morrow and it won't be so easy. Did you

see how Irvie laughed, too, when he was called the ‘King of the New York Night Spots’? He told me he was expecting some such reference because a head waiter once mistook him for somebody else and gave him the best table at a floor show or something and some of his classmates saw him there. He said it was the only time he’d ever been in the place. It’s all great fun!”

In the whole course of the afternoon Edgar Semple’s name was spoken only once; but it was received with a knowing acclaim from the class below us. The Class Prophet was merely naming over a group of Seniors for whom because of their studiousness he prophesied a gloomy fate in monastic seclusions; but when he came to Edgar he paused a moment and said, “Also in this category I see before me that Man Friday, good old Svengali Semple.” The speaker’s pause to let his meaning sink in was rewarded by the Seniors’ mirthful manifestation that they understood him perfectly, though nobody else did. Will Pease turned beaming to me.

“They certainly seem to appreciate having Edgar called Svengali. Some funny episode in his past four years, I suppose. I must ask him about it.”

Will forgot to do so, however. On the way from the cannon exercises we ran into Philippus Connors who with fervor congratulated him on Irvie’s thesis. Of course Will already knew something about it; but what he heard from Philippus almost burst him. “‘To be placed permanently in the University Library!’” he repeated at intervals after our happy encounter with Philippus. “Permanently! ‘A work of exceptional merit.’ Permanently! and that’s what the Faculty itself think of him. How could these four years end better? All these Commencement parents are proud, of course, and I mustn’t brag; but oh, I tell you, that boy of mine!”

. . . Wandering alone upon the campus after sunset, as older alumni sometimes wistfully do, I came beneath the windows of the rooms occupied by Irvie Pease and Edgar Semple. The windows were lighted; I saw Edgar passing and re-passing them, and, upon an impulse, went upstairs and found him alone, packing for departure.

“What’s the idea?” I asked him. “Isn’t your class assembled over in front of Old North to sing on the steps for the last time, or maybe the next to the last time? Why aren’t you with them?”

“Well, somebody’s got to do this,” he said. He alluded to the packing-boxes in which he was neatly placing accumulated books.

“Then I won’t interrupt you.”

“Why, no. That’s what I——” He paused; then asked me, “Didn’t you get a note I left for you at the Nassau Club this morning?”

“No, I haven’t been there to-day, Edgar.”

“It doesn’t matter, sir, since you’re here. It was just to ask you if you could spare a few minutes for a—for a confidential talk with me at any time before you’d be leaving. If you have the few minutes now it would be as good a time as any.”

“Yes.” I sat down. “What is it, Edgar?”

“It’s—it’s a little difficult.”

He stood before me, pondering, and I was almost humorously struck by the thought that in his essentials he'd changed little since his earlier boyhood. Naturally he was larger all over; but he would always be short and sturdy. He had developed a handsome profile if one noticed it; but he was still round-faced and still had what seemed to me the "bluest eyes in the world". Except for them he'd have seemed stolid, yet they never flashed; they had always, even when he was presumably merry, the same look of comprehending things maturely. No, Edgar hadn't changed much; he'd always been mature.

"Can I help you out with it?" I suggested. "There's something you'd like me to do?"

"Yes, if you could; but it's a good deal," he said, and his embarrassment continued. "I was wondering how good a financial risk you'd think I am. I'm pretty sure I could pay you back before long if you'd take my note for eighteen hundred dollars; but the matter's rather involved. You see, Irvie and I—well, we've gotten into debt."

"You and Irvie have?" I asked. "The two of you owe eighteen hundred dollars?"

"It amounts to that," he said. "The worst of it is Uncle Will's already sent us enough to clean everything up and he thinks it's all paid. I know he's been saving up to send us through Harvard Law School and I think it would embarrass him a good deal to let us have that much extra at this time. I wouldn't like to tell him that we need it, especially as he thinks all our bills have been settled."

"No, I'd not like to tell him that, either, Edgar."

"If I could borrow the eighteen hundred from you," Edgar said, "I could pay it back out of some money my father left me. I think it amounts to about seven thousand dollars; but the trouble is Uncle Will's always kept it invested for me. If I asked him for it right now when it's needed, or for eighteen hundred dollars of it, I'm afraid he might guess we hadn't settled our debts with the money he's already sent to do it with; but if I tell him later that I insist on paying my own expenses through the law school with the money my father left me, I think he'd be willing to let me have it and then I could pay you the eighteen hundred. Could you possibly let us have it, sir?"

"'Us'?" I said. "You mean 'us', do you, Edgar? You couldn't possibly be referring to expenses incurred by Irvie Pease, 'the King of the New York Night Spots'? You're not being exclusively a Man Friday just now, are you?"

The pink tint that spread over his face was undeniable. "Well, you see Irvie and I have always shared everything, sir."

"Which includes not only a Svengali thesis for the University Library but also such misfortunes as debts," I said, and produced a cheque-book.

## Chapter 17

EDGAR repaid me at Stonehaven in August after Will's arrival there. "He's a really admirable boy, that Edgar," Will said, not completely aware how truly he spoke. "It wasn't really much more expensive to send the two of them through college than it would have been for the one; but now he's turned independent and's insisted that he can get through the four years of the Harvard Law School on some money his father left him and doesn't intend to be any further expense to me ever. Of course I told him I had never regarded him as a burden and that I'd looked upon it as a pleasure and a privilege to do what I could for him. He said that knowing this had been the greatest happiness in his life; but he knew that the times were slack and things growing more and more expensive and he wouldn't feel right with himself unless I let him have his way. Well, I had to, didn't I?"

"Yes, I suppose so, since he put it like that."

"He did," Will said, "and pretty strongly, too. I had to respect his reasons. He's always been sound as a dollar and I'm proud of both of our boys. Another thing, too," Will finished brightly. "This may come in handy for Irvie. I'll probably be able to increase his allowance a little."

I hadn't much doubt that Irvie could use an increase nor that now Edgar had his own money he would become Irvie's banker as long as it lasted. This devoted ant, while his stores sufficed, would never refuse the grasshopper. The mainspring of Edgar's young life was his gratitude for what Will and Evelyn had done for him and to repay it in some measure. He would always work to grant them their dearest wish, which was for the special kind of "success" they wanted for Irvie.

If Irvie didn't have it Edgar wanted him to appear to them to have it. He'd "cover up" for him; he'd go to any pains required to bring Irvie the distinctions that rejoiced them. More, his affection for Irvie himself was of such indulgence that it was a little like Emma's own. Their two devotions to the one object were complete.

What inspires the passionate friendships of youth is often a mystery to older people. Parents, and even uncles, see the children apparently wasting treasures of love and admiration in what's obviously, sometimes even ludicrously, a wrong direction; even tactful opposition brings only a fire of championage. There were these two boys, Irvie and Edgar, and Emma Millerwood knew them. Anybody with a good mind would have said she couldn't hesitate a moment between them, and she had a good mind; but she'd unhesitatingly chosen Irvie as the inspiration of her young life—and so had Edgar chosen Irvie as the basic motive for all his actions. Irvie had the something that so inspired them, and between them, and with all the Peases back of them, they'd have their chance to make

of him a happy and successful man.

I wasn't to see much more of their immediate progress toward that goal. For a longer time than I could spare I had to interrupt my seasons at Stonehaven and at home, too. The winter before Emma came out of Bryn Mawr was a hard one on my burdened elderliness, and Dr. Erb hustled me to Arizona. Harriet went with me, but only for my installation upon a salubrious ranch, and there I stayed—not unhappily, for I could still ride a little and I wrote enough to finish two more books. I had not infrequent letters from “all the family” except Irvie, who was reported by Harriet to have become “a great favorite in Boston”. She was amused by Edgar's seeming to fall into the habit of “just being a book-worm, not caring how he looks and wearing the same old clothes the whole time.” He didn't come to Stonehaven at all during his vacations now; but continued his studies in Will's office and did legal odd jobs of various kinds for the firm.

From Stonehaven she reported voluminously and with bitterness: “After trying for two seasons with no success to rent their cottage, the Blue family are back in it again. Emma tells me that Janey tried her hand at several jobs but didn't make a go at any of them and I must say you'd hardly know her as the same girl she used to be. She's as amiable as ever but somehow looks all dried up and perfectly certain to be an old maid. The one shock seems to have made a sort of husk of her. I suppose you may not see enough of lighter current periodicals to be aware of the present career of the person who gave it to her; but one can't pick up any of them in the Inn reading-room without being confronted by the face of Mrs. George Prettiman. They say she has a press agent and I don't doubt it—‘Mrs. George Prettiman sips cocktails with Prince Rebedos’; ‘Mrs. George Prettiman's table at Giambini's’—oh, Mrs. George Prettiman at Jockey Clubs, at restaurants, at night spots and on beaches, Mrs. George Prettiman everywhere.

“There seems to be a sort of public for this new type, its Roman entertainments and panoplies. We've always had the great spenders, but the older breed of them had a kind of dignity, founded hospitals and libraries, lived in as much quiet as they could find. Who are these new ones? They aren't ‘climbers’—they aren't even conscious of the old prestiges that could be climbed to. I think what they want is simply envy for their conspicuousness and power. It makes one wonder what kind of world we're living in. Sometimes everything seems upside down with every kind of vulgarity on top, and yet we know that there does still exist our same old world wherein there's decency in taste and manners and people still lead sensible lives in their own quiet ways. What's more, I firmly believe such people are even in the majority, though they seem submerged under all this gaudiness, hectic pretense, restlessness and modernity. Among all the hundreds of people we know at home no one is much like that and neither are any of our friends that we know in other cities. Here at Stonehaven the new breed was unknown until the Stellings came, and Mrs. George Prettiman, outdoing her mother a hundredfold, will never set eyes on the place again. She took what she wanted from it, and, not having inherited the hay fever, will have no possible use for her mother's dusty old palace on the hilltop, thank heaven.

“I've never seen Emma happier than she is this summer.”

I knew what Harriet meant by that concluding sentence.

When old Erb crabbedly went over me upon my return home he acknowledged the

caution of my Arizona medical adviser, but said, "Oh, yes, you could have come back months ago; but it's just as well to be safe. Guess that's what you'll be now if some of these new bugs they're always finding don't get at you. Well, I guess your sister'll have told you all about the 'new blood' Will Pease has got in his law office. You can't keep that Irvie down; he's been showing off again."

Irvie had, and most effectively. I knew all about it from Harriet's recent letters and from Will Pease's and from Emma's. During this first year after their graduation from the law school Will had put the groundwork of one of his important cases in the hands of the "new blood", Irvie and Edgar, and this groundwork had been done so thoroughly that when the case came to be tried, Will himself and the older attorneys had been astonished to find how little was left for them to do. The two youngest members of the firm had the affair so well in hand, in fact, that wisdom decreed its being left to them almost entirely. Edgar's preparation of the case, and in particular an argument Will assigned to Irvie, had brought subsequent expressions of approval not far short of enthusiastic from both judge and jury. Will felt a new solidity in his office, and Irvie had won actual reputation as an expert "trial lawyer".

"What a team!" Will said. "By the time we went into court we found we had to leave virtually the whole thing to those two because they'd made themselves such masters of every detail that they knew a lot more about it than we did, ourselves. Now we know who'll take our places when we retire."

Old Fenelon Pease, a cousin Will had inherited as a rather idle member of the firm, stopped me on the street and added something to this. "I don't go to court much these days; but I didn't miss an hour of that trial. It was a fascinating thing to see how that case had been prepared and how it worked out, unfolding itself day after day. Really it almost didn't need any of the speeches; that young Semple had the whole thing on the table before him clear as day. It was interesting to see how my young cousin Irvie came back to him for point after point and Semple always had them for him. I don't mean that Irvie didn't make a good speech. He did indeed; but who couldn't under such circumstances? Of course I don't mean to take away any of the credit he won for it."

"No, of course not," I said, and the better understood Will Pease when he informed me that Irvie'd have a longer vacation than would Edgar that summer. "There really isn't much for Irvie to do around the office for this while," Will said. "Nothing important's coming up during the summer and he might just as well go on to Stonehaven when his mother and the rest of you do. Edgar's needed, though. He's come to be kind of a backbone for the detail work in the office that's always having to be cleared away. I think I can bring him on with me in August. He hasn't taken any vacation at all for some years. Says he hasn't needed any; but he'll be the better for a little freshening up at old Stonehaven. He's certainly a Trojan for work."

"A little freshening up at old Stonehaven," Will had said, and, when I had my first glimpse of the sea on our drive from the station, I knew that this was what I'd needed for myself. Orion Clafley had a new four-cylinder engine in the "One o'Clock" and the boat was ready for me. I was out with him in her the next day and so were Emma and Irvie Pease, laughing together over the futility of their putting out trolling lines that never

caught anything.

## Chapter 18

IRVIE must have felt that anything like a clear-cut proposal of marriage to Emma would be to deal in the superfluous, and probably so did she. She'd been so long and so plainly "there" for him as whatever he needed her to be—wife, servant, supporter, anything at all—he had only to realize that he did need her and their affair seemed to be settled. It had taken that shape during my absence, and Emma herself, and of course Harriet, and Evelyn, too—though Evelyn may have doubted that anybody in the world would ever be quite "up to" Irvie—were now well content.

As Harriet had written me, Emma was indeed happy. She'd never been a possessive girl; but she now possessed what she'd always wanted, the long prospect of ministering to the beloved. I don't think that she understood his need of an Edgar Semple to minister to him, too.

Irvie was as optimistically versatile in his plans for the future as he'd always been in the past. Without eavesdropping I'd often hear fragments of these plans projected to my always receptive niece as the two passed and re-passed my chair gayly arm-in-arm in their pacyings of the Inn's long verandah.

"It'll take a lot of money but I'll swing it," I'd hear him say; and, on their return to where I sat, "A house in the country, not too big at first but we can add to it. Lots of visitors and dogs and shooting——" And then, as they came by again, "Interesting people. Not the commonplace kind, but people we'd really like to entertain, people who've been everywhere and done all sorts of things and——" Then as they came again, "That part of the firm's fee they split between Edgar and me didn't amount to so much, and things may come a little slow at first; but there are lots of openings now in reorganizing business and in politics and all that. I might take a whirl at a senatorship some time, who knows?" Irvie was laughing as he said this, but was a little more serious as they passed again. "Then we must have a station wagon with Something Farms on it. Country life for our background but lots of travel thrown in and——"

It was too easy to see that for Emma these were not merely words. They were enchantments, not because of what they promised—she didn't care about that—but because they were the music of the voice she loved; it didn't matter what Irvie said; the voice was enough. What she saw when she looked at him couldn't be seen by any other, even though the reflection of her vision shone in her own face. Irvie saw it there and delighted in it; but so could anybody else see it there and when I did, too much, I felt myself to be an unwishful intruder and that I needed a walk.

"Idyllic" was of course my sister's word for the state of things. "Naturally Will knows it's happening and he couldn't be more delighted. When he comes, in August, you'll see. He told me before we left home that he'd always wished this might happen when Irvie

came to settle down—everything so suitable. A girl that Irvie'd grown up with and who understood him and would help to make his future as bright as it ought to be. I don't like extreme words; but oh, I don't see how anything could be more rapturous!"

We'd come to Stonehaven a little earlier than usual, toward the end of June. It was the day after Harriet had gone so far as "rapturous" that Evelyn came indignantly to our lunch-table with what seemed a portent. She'd been talking with a group of fellow-guests on the verandah. "Here it is the twelfth of July," she said. "Wouldn't you think that if anybody intended to occupy a cottage for this summer they'd already have done it? Besides, who in the world would want to rent a 'show place' like the Stellings'?"

"Who does?" Irvie asked. "Are there signs of life on the hilltop?"

"Yes, there are," Evelyn said. "Gardeners getting weeds out of the driveway, and Mrs. Paxton was motoring by there yesterday and said she saw one of those enormous trucks just going in. Said she thought she saw another farther up the driveway. Of course the place would have to be renovated if there's going to be a tenant; but——"

Irvie, teasing his mother, interrupted with a mischievous suggestion. "Maybe it's Sylvia herself coming back to look the old place over once more. Wouldn't it be a treat to see good old George Prettiman, the beautiful millionaire, on our beach again?"

"What a horrible thought!" his mother exclaimed. "No, it's absolutely impossible that anybody could be so lost to decency. Even she'd never do such a thing—with the Blues in their cottage and Janey here to be faced every day. No, I'm not fearing anything as bad as that; but I did hope that no overpowering family would ever rent that place. No other kind of family would want it or be able to pay for it; but it does look as if it's happening."

Two days later, as the people of France were celebrating the anniversary of the capture of the Bastille, there appeared on our beach at Stonehaven a figure comparable in its effect on ourselves to what the French might be supposed to feel did they behold, seemingly reclined in the flesh, an apparition of Louis XVI. Our own apparition, moreover, might well have written "*Rien*" in his diary as Louis is said to have done on the evening of the day that cost him everything; one was as little aware as the other that anything extraordinary had happened or was happening. George Prettiman, whom we beheld with incredulity before us, plainly didn't know that he was startling or even that Janey Blue's friends had gathered about her as if to shut out the sight of him.

Some people come to Stonehaven for but a season; others for two or three. They live on the fringes of the place, as it were; know little and care less about either its continuous life or the semi-continuous life that gathers itself there every summer. On the beach these fringe people were disporting themselves as usual, not conscious how the habitués had clustered themselves into groups focussing their unbelieving stares upon Mr. Prettiman.

When I arrived he was just coming up out of the surf to stand placidly dripping upon its fluctuant edges and debate with himself, apparently, the question whether or not he'd be the better for another dip. He'd lost his beauty; fat can do this in less time than that elapsed since we'd seen him. Any sculptor knows how readily a little over-pudginess of a chin can bring pudginess to a nose, too, and how a slight protrusion of the abdomen can dwindle the proportions of a leg. He'd lost not a part of his beauty but all of it and was as little conscious of this as that he'd ever had any. For some moments he stood in contented vague contemplation; then returned into the surf.

The groups of bathers and non-bathers who'd been centered upon him spellbound began to break up and circulate among themselves. They all seemed to be saying, or, rather, gasping, "Can you believe it!"

Irvie Pease and Emma had been swimming far out beyond the life raft, unaware of the sensation ashore. They turned, and it happened that they came out of the surf at the same time that George Prettiman came forth from his second plunge therein. The three figures emerged together with no one else near them. Emma stared, confounded; then gave George an amazed nod of recognition and walked away. Irvie Pease remained, however, the noon sun shining on his wet head and on George's. Greetings were exchanged and the two shook hands; Irvie was seen to be holding some converse with the pariah.

"Oh, I wish he hadn't done that!" Harriet exclaimed. "Surely he didn't need to shake hands with him."

"But he couldn't very well help it," Evelyn said. "George put out his hand, and after all he's an old friend of Irvie's. I wish I knew what they're saying." She had not long to wait. George went to the bath-houses and Irvie came laughing to join a hurriedly increasing group about his mother. Everybody wanted to know what had been said.

"Just nothing at all," Irvie reported. "Except he's fat as the Dickens, you wouldn't know he'd ever been away. He said Hello and didn't I think the water colder than usual to-day, and I said, 'Well, not much colder', and he said well, maybe it wasn't but just seemed so to him, and then he said, 'Well, be seeing you,' and trotted off to his bath-house." Irvie looked merrily at the semi-circle of serious faces now about him. "What more did you expect? Old George never said anything yet, did he?"

Three voices asked the same question, "But does it mean *she's* here?"

"Search me!" Irvie said, and he and Emma went back for another swim.

The talk at our lunch-table and most of the other tables at the Inn, too, was concerned with the same question: Had *she* had the effrontery to come back to Stonehaven or was George Prettiman a mere errand boy detached to see that the palace was made ready for a tenant? For our table at least, Irvie disposed of the latter possibility. "Does anybody think he's got sense enough?"

The question was settled the next day. I had not been to the beach but returned, at the hour for lunch, from an excursion in the "One o'Clock", and the commotion of talk I heard from the Inn verandah gave me the answer as I went up the steps. It was jumbled but the fragments were sufficient: "No wonder she brought a house-party with her!" . . . "Looked as discontented as ever." . . . "Oh, she'd have front enough for anything." . . . "Who on earth *are* those people she's brought here—self-confident theatrical-looking, the kind she *would* bring here?" . . . "Why on earth did Irvie Pease feel called upon to——"

Irvie, standing just inside the screened doors of the Inn, was explaining that matter to his mother and Harriet. Both ladies, for almost the first time in their lives, looked critical of him, Harriet so much so that her displeasure was marked by her not looking at him at all. Apparently she looked out through the screen doors. Evelyn was almost sharp with him.

"Why on earth you had to let that woman go about presenting you to all her party

\_\_\_\_\_”

“She didn’t, Mother!” Irvie’s tone was protestive. “I didn’t meet half of ’em. You see, there was a man I’d known at college——”

“Yes, you’ve explained that, Irving.”

“Well, I had to speak to him, didn’t I? I couldn’t——”

Emma came in, interrupting. “The most amazing thing! I mean the effect of Janey Blue’s getting another glimpse of George Prettiman. She doesn’t know how it happened to her.”

“How what happened to her?” Harriet asked.

“I mean the whole thing, Mother. He’s pudgy, absolutely pudgy! She doesn’t know how it happened to her in the first place. She sees she must have worshipped his beauty and it’s all gone. I talked to her and she wonders—she absolutely wonders!—how she wasted so much time on him and so much tragedy. She’s really cured; but isn’t it strange?”

The following is a synopsis of the end as Mr. Tarkington wrote it, with the addition of some notes of his:

The very things that Irvie’s father and mother deplore—the publicity, the riches and show-off that attend Sylvia—attract Irvie. Sylvia tires of her beautiful, “harmless” George Prettiman and she decides upon changing him for Irvie.

Irvie is tempted by the vision—yachts, palaces, shining as the host at great parties, living in the delightful glare of the continuous conspicuousness that he loves. Edgar is horrified, tries to fight off the coming dreadful blow to Emma, the treachery to an old friend, George Prettiman, and the crushing disappointment to Will and Evelyn Pease, who abhor Sylvia Stelling and everything for which she stands.

Edgar’s devoted a large part of his own life to building up Irvie as a fine and triumphant figure in a worthy and useful life; he has subordinated even his own lifelong devotion to Emma for that end. In despair he sees that he has failed with Irvie, for whom Aladdin’s Cave has seemed to open.

All the egoism with which Irvie was born and which has been so long fostered by those who have loved him draws him onward. He falls for his vision of what Sylvia offers and takes her.

More than balancing this dénouement and “on the bright side”, is the increasing emphasis placed upon the developing character of Edgar Semple. Irvie has been the “show window”; but Edgar is the stock of goods, so to speak. Of course Irvie’s father’s plans for the two boys fall to the ground—Irvie isn’t going to be any good citizen, fine home-town lawyer; that’s all off. He looks toward being a great gentleman, country life, Palm Beach, big house-parties, patron of the arts, racing stable maybe. Will Pease’s plans, however, though at first seeming to fall to the ground, don’t do so. Edgar Semple, who in reality has always been the backbone of Irvie’s “success”, brilliantly upholds those plans and will more than fulfill Will’s hopes for the old law office.

The narrator's partiality for Edgar is justified and his half-hidden long hope in regard to Emma is satisfied. Her maturing mind, awakened by shock, at last perceives that all along the best of Irvie, so to say, has come from Edgar. Edgar was always the substance and Irvie the surface glitter.

As for Irvie himself—to continue with another allusion to the Arabian Nights—the result is not Aladdin's Cave but the ship upon which Sinbad is drawn to destruction upon the Lodestone Rock. Sylvia's released egoism hasn't let her picture herself as an over-shadowed or subservient wife but the rather as a super-dominant figure—with husbands (if she chooses another presently) who serve as equerries or attendants, background figures who must do what she tells them and run errands as she chooses. For all her follies and costly glitterings, she holds the purse strings tight, as did her mother before her—though possibly she'd let Irvie collect stamps and become another faded figure like her father, the unnoticeable Mr. Stelling.

Irvie is left to his tragi-comedy; but, to the narrator's great satisfaction, the reward for Emma and for Irvie's parents, too, rests upon the competent shoulders and the rising star of Edgar Semple.

#### NOTES:

An instance of Irvie's talk—an automobile accident he saw. His whole account consists of what *he* was doing before, during and after the accident; what he said and did. Nothing about the people who were hurt.

I'd see Irvie one day with a Great Dane. Irvie loves to pretend to fight with the big dog. Irvie always thinks someone's looking at him. When he walks he's always making a picture out of himself—his dog is an appanage, like something to wear. After Sylvia is married to Irvie he gets to be her Great Dane—only middle-sized and rather cowed. Nobody's ever stood up to Sylvia and nobody's going to.

Will Pease dies, and Irvie at the funeral is a conspicuous and noble sufferer—holding up his mother. Self-conscious grief, though of course he does feel some. Edgar looked after things.

I see a party as probably the last view you'd have of Irvie. Sylvia is fascinated and courting somebody else. Irvie's rather carelessly ordered by her to run and get something for the benefit of the man she's showing off at. I'd been afraid that Emma might again be glamored and made unhappy by seeing Irvie at the party, where I think he will be as of yore the great figure and will give Emma a return of her feeling for him. Doesn't—because Irvie is a pricked balloon.

In the end, when Sylvia has thrown Irvie out, Emma and I both suppose Edgar will take him back into the law firm, even though Edgar now has another partner. Edgar says no and means no. Irvie would be thought to have a right to come back into what had once been his father's old firm; but Edgar is hard about it. No!

I see this is partly Edgar's anger over the way Irvie treated Emma, and for the first time Emma—married to Edgar for some months—seems really to look up to him.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Show Piece* by Booth Tarkington]