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WHAT TIMMY DID

MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

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By MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

WHAT TIMMY DID
FROM OUT THE VASTY DEEP
THE LONELY HOUSE
GOOD OLD ANNA
LOVE AND HATRED
LILLA: A PART OF HER LIFE
THE RED CROSS BARGE

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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WHAT TIMMY DID

BY

MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

AUTHOR OF "FROM OUT THE VASTY DEEP," "THE LONELY HOUSE," "LOVE AND HATRED," "GOOD OLD ANNA," "THE CHINK IN THE ARMOUR," ETC.

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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"Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog."

—*Psalms* xxii, 20.

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WHAT TIMMY DID

CHAPTER I

THE telephone bell rang sharply in the sunlit and charming, if shabby, hall of Old Place.

To John Tosswill there was always something incongruous, and recurringly strange, in this queer link between a little country parish mentioned in Domesday Book and the big bustling modern world.

The bell tinkled on and on insistently, perhaps because it was now no one's special duty to attend to it. But at last the mistress of the house came running from the garden and, stripping off her gardening gloves, took up the receiver.

Janet Tosswill was John Tosswill's second wife, and, though over forty, a still young and alert looking woman, more Irish than Scotch in appearance, with her dark hair and blue eyes. But she came of good Highland stock and was proud of it.

"London wants you," came the tired, cross voice she knew all too well.

"I think there must be some mistake. This is Old Place, Beechfield, Surrey. I don't think anyone can be ringing us from London."

She waited a moment impatiently. Of course it was a mistake! Not a soul in London knew their telephone number. It had never been put on their notepaper.

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Still, she went on listening with the receiver held to her ear, and growing more and more annoyed at the futile interruption and waste of time.

She was just going to hang up the receiver when all at once the expression of her face altered. From being good-humoured, if slightly impatient, it became watchful, and her eyes narrowed as was their way when Janet Tosswill was "upset" about anything. She had suddenly heard, with startling clearness, the words:—"Is that Old Place, Beechfield? If so, Mr. Godfrey Radmore would like to speak to Mrs. Tosswill."

She was so surprised, so taken aback that for a moment she said nothing. At last she answered very quietly:—"Tell Mr. Radmore that Mrs. Tosswill is here waiting on the 'phone."

There was another longish pause, and then, before anything else happened, Janet Tosswill experienced an odd sensation; it was as if she felt the masterful, to her not over-attractive, presence of Godfrey Radmore approaching the other end of the line. A moment later, she knew he was there, within earshot, but silent.

"Is that you, Godfrey? We thought you were in Australia. Have you been home long?"

The answer came at once, in the deep, resonant, once familiar voice—the voice no one had heard in Old Place for nine years—nine years with the war having happened in between.

"Indeed no, Janet! I've only been back a very short time." (She noticed he did not say how long.) "And I want to know when I may come down and see you all? I hope you and Mr. Tosswill will believe me when I say it wasn't my fault that I didn't come to Beechfield last year. I hadn't a spare moment!"

The tone of the unseen speaker had become awkward, apologetic, and the listener bit her lips—she did not

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believe in his explanation as to why he had behaved with such a lack of gratitude and good feeling last autumn.

"We shall be very glad to see you at any time, of course. When can we expect you?"

But the welcoming words were uttered very coldly.

"It's Tuesday to-day; I was thinking of motoring down on Friday or Saturday. I've got a lot of business to do before then. Will that be all right?"

"Of course it will. Come Friday."

She was thawing a little, and perhaps he felt this, for there came an eager, yearning note into the full, deep voice which sounded so oddly near, and which, for the moment, obliterated the long years since she had heard it last.

"How's my godson? Flick still in the land of the living, eh?"

"Thank heaven, yes! That dog's the one thing in the world Timmy cares for, I sometimes think."

He felt that she was smiling now.

She heard the question:—"Another three minutes, sir?" and the hasty answer:—"Yes, another three minutes," and then, "Still there, Janet?"

"Of course I am. We'll expect you on Friday, Godfrey, by tea-time, and I hope you'll stay as long as you can. You won't mind having your old room?"

"Rather not!" and then in a hesitating, shamefaced voice:—"I needn't tell *you* that to me Old Place *is* home."

It was in a very kindly voice that she answered: "I'm glad you still feel like that, Godfrey."

"Of course I do, and of course I am ashamed of not having written more often. I often think of you all —especially of dear old George——" There came a pause, then the words:—"I want to ask you a question, Janet."

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Janet Tosswill felt quite sure she knew what that question would be. Before linking up with them all again Godfrey wanted to know certain facts about George. While waiting for him to speak she had time to tell herself that this would prove that her husband and Betty, the eldest of her three step-daughters, had been wrong in thinking that Godfrey Radmore knew that George, Betty's twin, had been killed in the autumn of 1916. At that time all correspondence between Radmore and Old Place had ceased for a long time. When it had begun again in 1917, in the form of a chaffing letter and a cheque for five pounds to the writer's godson, Betty had suggested that nothing should be said of George's death in Timmy's answer. Of course Betty's wish had been respected, the more so that Janet herself felt sure that Godfrey did not know. Why, he and George—dear, sunny-natured George—had been like fond brothers in the long ago, before Godfrey's unfortunate love-affair with Betty.

And so it was that when she heard his next words they took her entirely by surprise, for it was such an unimportant, as well as unexpected, question that the unseen speaker asked.

"Has Mrs. Crofton settled down at The Trellis House yet?"

"She's arriving to-day, I believe. When she first thought of coming here she wrote John such a nice letter, saying she was a friend of yours, and that you had told her about Beechfield. Luckily, The Trellis House was to let, so John wrote and told her about it."

Then, at last, came a more intimate question. The man's voice at the other end of the telephone became diffident—hesitating:—"Are you all right? Everything as usual?"

She answered, drily. "Everything's quite as usual,

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thank you. Beechfield never changes. Since you were last here there have only been two new cottages built." She paused perceptibly, and then went on:—"I think that Timmy told you that Betty was with the Scottish Women's Hospital during the war? She's got one of the best French decorations."

Should she say anything about George? Before she could make up her mind she heard the words—"You can't go on any longer now. Time's up." And Radmore called out hastily:—"Till Friday then—so long!"

Janet Tosswill hung up the receiver; but she did not move away from the telephone at once. She stood there, wondering painfully whether she had better go along and tell Betty *now*, or whether it would be better to wait till, say, lunch, when all the young people would be gathered together? After all Betty had been nineteen when her engagement to Godfrey Radmore had been broken off, and so very much had happened since then.

And then, in a sense, her mind was made up for her by the fact that a shadow fell across the floor of the hall, and looking up, she saw her old friend and confidant, Dr. O'Farrell, blocking up the doorway with his big burly body.

"D'you remember Godfrey Radmore?" she asked as their hands met.

"Come now, you're joking surely. Remember Radmore? I've good cause to; I don't know whether I ever told you—" there came a slight, very slight note of embarrassment into his hearty Irish voice—"that I wrote to the good fellow just after the Armistice, about our Pat. That the boy's doing as well out in Brisbane as he is, is largely owing to Radmore's good offices."

Mrs. Tosswill was surprised, and not quite pleased. She wondered why Dr. O'Farrell had not told her at the time that he was writing to Godfrey. She still subcon-

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sciously felt that Godfrey Radmore belonged to Old Place and to no one else in Beechfield.

"I didn't know about Pat," she said slowly. "But you'll be able to thank him in person now, for he's coming on Friday to stay with us."

"Is he now?" The shrewd Irishman looked sharply into her troubled face. "Well, well, you'll have to let bygones be bygones—eh, Mrs. Toss? I take it he's a great man now."

"I don't think money makes for greatness," she said.

"Don't you?" he queried drily. "I do! Come admit, woman, that you're sorry *now* you didn't let Betty take the risk?"

"I'm not at all sorry—" she cried. "It was all his fault. He was such a strange, rough, violent young fellow!"

The words trembled on the old doctor's lips—"Perhaps it will all come right now!" But he checked himself, for in his heart of hearts he did not in the least believe that it would all come right. He knew well enough that Godfrey Radmore, after that dramatic exit to Australia, had cut himself clean off from all his friends. He was coming back now as that wonderful thing to most people—a millionaire. Was it likely, so the worldly-wise old doctor asked himself, that a man whose whole circumstances had so changed, ever gave a thought to that old boyish love affair with Betty Tosswill?—violent, piteous and painful as the affair had been. But had Betty forgotten? About that the doctor had his doubts, but he kept them strictly to himself.

He changed the subject abruptly. "It isn't scarlet fever at the Mortons—only a bit of a red rash. I thought you'd like to know.

"It's good of you to have come and told me," she

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exclaimed. "I confess I did feel anxious, for Timmy was there the whole of the day before yesterday."

"Ah! and how's me little friend?"

Janet Tosswill looked around—but no, there was no one in the corridor of which the door, giving into the hall, was wide open.

"He's gone to do an errand for me in the village."

"The boy is much more normal, eh?" He looked at her questioningly.

"He still says that he sees things," she admitted reluctantly, "though he's rather given up confiding in me. He tells old Nanna extraordinary tales, but then, as you know, Timmy was always given to romancing, and of course Nanna believes every word he says and in a way encourages him."

The doctor looked at Timmy's mother with a twinkle in his eye. "Nanna isn't the only one," he observed. "I was told in the village just now that Master Timmy had scared away the milk from Tencher's cow."

A look of annoyance came over Mrs. Tosswill's face. "I shall have to speak to Timmy," she exclaimed. "He's much too given to threatening the village people with ill fortune if they have done anything he thinks wrong or unkind. The child was awfully upset the other day because he discovered that the Tenchers had drowned a half-grown kitten."

"He's a queer little chap," observed the old doctor, "a broth of a boy, if ye'll allow me to say so—I'd be proud of Timmy if I were his mother, Mrs. Toss!"

"Perhaps I *am* proud of him," she said smiling, "but still I always tell John he's a changeling child—so absurdly unlike all the others."

"Ah, but that's where *you* come in, me good friend. 'Twas a witch you must have had among ye're ancestresses in the long ago."

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He gripped her hand, and went out to his two-seater, his mind still full of his friend's strange little son.

Then all at once—he could not have told you why—Dr. O'Farrell's mind switched off to something very different, and he went back into the hall again.

"A word more with ye, Mrs. Tosswill. What sort of a lady has taken The Trellis House, eh? We don't even know her name."

"She's a Mrs. Crofton—oddly enough, a friend or acquaintance of Godfrey Radmore. He seems to have first met her during the war, when he was quartered in Egypt. She wrote to John and asked if there was a house to let in Beechfield, quoting Godfrey as having told her it was a delightful village."

"And how old may she be?"

"Her husband was a Colonel Crofton, so I suppose she's middle-aged. She's only been a widow three months—if as long."

Janet Tosswill waited till Dr. O'Farrell was well away, and then she began walking down the broad corridor which divided Old Place. It was such a delightful, dignified, spacious house, and very dear to them all, yet Janet was always debating within herself whether they ought to go on living in it, now that they had become so poor.

When she came to the last door on the left, close to the baize door which shut off the commons from the living rooms, she waited a moment. Then, turning the handle, she walked into what was still called the schoolroom, though Timmy never did his lessons there.

Betty Tosswill, the eldest of John Tosswill's three daughters, was sitting at a big mid-Victorian writing-table, examining the house-books. She had just discovered two "mistakes" in the milkman's account, and she

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felt perhaps unreasonably sorry and annoyed. Betty had a generous, unsuspicious outlook on human nature, and a meeting with petty dishonesty was always a surprise. She looked up with a very friendly, welcoming smile as her step-mother came into the room. They were very good friends, these two, and they had a curiously close bond in Timmy, the only child of the one and the half-brother of the other. Betty was now twenty-eight and there were only two persons in the world whom she had loved in her life as well as she now loved her little brother.

As her step-mother came close up to her—"Janet? What's the matter?" she exclaimed, and as the other made no answer, a look of fear came over the girl's face. She got up from her chair. "Don't look like that, Janet, —you're frightening me!"

The older woman tried to smile. "To tell the truth, Betty, I've had rather a shock. You heard the telephone bell ring?"

"You mean some minutes ago?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"Godfrey Radmore, speaking from London."

"Is that all? I was afraid that something had happened to Timmy!" But, even so, the colour flamed up into Betty Tosswill's face.

Her step-mother looked away out of the window as she went on:—"It was stupid of me to have been so surprised, but somehow I thought he was still in Australia."

"He was in England last year." Betty, not really knowing what she was doing, bent over the peccant milkman's book.

"He's coming down here on Friday. I think he realises that I haven't forgiven him for not coming to see us last year. Still we must let bygones be bygones."

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Then she wondered with a sharp touch of self-reproach what had made her say such a stupid thing—a thing which might have, and indeed had, two such different meanings? What she had *meant* had been that she must forget the hurt surprise she and her husband had felt that Godfrey Radmore, on two separate occasions, had deliberately avoided coming down from London to what had been, after all, so long his home; in fact, as he himself had said just now, the only home he had ever known.

But what was this Betty was saying?—her face rather drawn and white, all the bright colour drifted out of it—"Of course we must, Janet! Besides Godfrey was not to blame—not at the last."

Janet knew what Betty meant. That at the end it was she who had failed him. But when their engagement had been broken off, Godfrey had been worse than penniless—in debt, and entirely through his own fault. He had gambled away what little money he had, and it had ended in his going off to Australia—alone.

Then an astounding thing had happened. Godfrey had had a fortune left him by an eccentric old man in whose employment he had been as secretary for a while. His luck still holding, he had gone through most of the war, including Gallipoli, with only one wound, which had left no ill effects. A man so fortunate ought not to have neglected his old friends.

Janet Tosswill, the step-mother completely merging into the friend, came forward, and put her arms round the girl's shoulders. "Look here, Betty. Wouldn't you rather go away? I don't suppose he'll stay longer than Monday or Tuesday——"

"I shouldn't think of going away! I expect he's forgotten all about that old affair. It's a long time ago, Janet—nine years. We were both so young, that I've

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forgotten too—in a sense." And then, as she saw that the other was far more moved than she herself was outwardly, she repeated: "It really has faded away, almost out of sight. Think of all that has happened since then!"

The other muttered, "Yes, that's true," and Betty went on, a little breathlessly, "I'll tell you who'll be pleased—that's Timmy. He's got a regular hero-worship of Godfrey." She was smiling now. "I hope he asked after his godson?"

"Indeed he did. After Flick too! By the way he wanted to know if Mrs. Crofton was settled down in The Trellis House. I wonder if she's an Australian?"

"I don't think so," said Betty. "I think he met them in Egypt during the war. He mentioned them in one of his letters to Timmy, and then, when he was in England last year, he must have stayed with them, for that's where Flick came from. Colonel Crofton bred terriers. I remember reading Timmy a long letter signed "Cecil Crofton" telling him all about how to manage Flick, and he mentioned Godfrey."

"I don't remember that—I must have been away."

They were both glad to have glided on to a safe, indifferent subject.

"I'll go back to my carnations now, but first I'd better tell your father the news."

"You—you—needn't remind father of anything that happened years ago, Janet—need you?"

Janet Tosswill shook her head, and yet when she had shut the door behind her in her husband's study, almost the first words she uttered, after having told him of Godfrey Radmore's coming visit, were:—"I shall never, never forgive him for the way he treated Betty. I hate the thought of having to be nice to him—I wish Timmy wasn't his godson!"

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She spoke the words breathlessly, defiantly, standing before her old John's untidy writing table.

As she spoke, he rather nervously turned some papers over under his hand:—"I don't know that he behaved as badly as you think, my dear. Neither of them had any money, and at that time he had no prospects."

"He'd thrown away his prospects! Then I can't forgive him for his behaviour last year—never coming down to see us, I mean. It was so—so ungrateful! Handsome presents don't make up for that sort of thing. I used to long to send the things back."

"I don't think you're fair," began Mr. Tosswill deprecatingly. "He did write me a very nice letter, Janet, explaining that it was impossible for him to come."

"Well, I suppose we must make the best of it—particularly as he says that he's come back to England for good."

She went out of the room, and so into the garden—back to the border she had left unwillingly but at which she now glanced down with a sensation of disgust. She felt thoroughly ruffled and upset—a very unusual condition for her to be in, for Janet Tosswill was an equable and happy-natured woman, for all her affectionate and sensitive heart.

She told herself that it was true the whole world had altered in the last nine years—everything had altered except Beechfield. The little Surrey village seemed to her mind exactly the same as it was when she had come there, as a bride, fourteen years ago, except that almost everybody in it, from being comfortably off, had become uncomfortably poor. Then all at once, she smiled. The garden of Old Place was very different from the garden she had found when she first came there. It had been a melancholy, neglected, singularly ugly garden—the kind of garden which only costly bedding-out had made tol-

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erable in some prosperous early Victorian day. Now it was noted for its charm and beauty even among the many beautiful gardens of the neighbourhood, and during the War she had made quite a lot of money selling flowers and fruit for the local Red Cross. Now she was trying to coax her husband to take one of the glebe fields on a long lease in order to start a hamper trade in fruit, vegetables and flowers. Dolly, the one of her three step-daughters whom she liked least, was fond of gardening, in a dull plodding way, and might be trained to such work.

But try though she did to forget Godfrey Radmore, her mind swung ceaselessly back to the man with whom she had just had that curious talk on the telephone. She was sorry—not glad as a more worldly woman would have been—that Godfrey Radmore was coming back into their life.

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CHAPTER II

WHILE Janet Tosswill was thinking so intently of Godfrey Radmore, he himself was standing at the window of a big bedroom in one of those musty, expensive, old-fashioned hotels, which, perhaps because they are within a stone's throw of Piccadilly, still have faithful patrons all the year round, and are full to bursting during the London Season. As to Radmore, he had chosen it because it was the place where the grandfather who had brought him up always stayed when he, Godfrey, was a little boy.

Tall, well-built after the loose-limbed English fashion, and with a dark, intelligent, rather grim cast of face, Radmore looked older than his age, which was thirty-two. Yet, for all that, there was an air of power and of reserved strength about him that set him apart from his fellows, and a casual observer would have believed him cold, and perhaps a thought calculating, in nature.

Yet, standing there, looking out on that quiet, narrow street, he was seething with varying emotions in which he was, in a sense, luxuriating, though whether he would have admitted any living being to a share in them was another matter.

Home! Home at last for good!—after what had been, with two short breaks, a nine years' absence from England, and from all that England stands for to such a man.

He had left his country in 1910, an angry, embittered lad of twenty-three, believing that he would never come back or, at any rate, not till he was an old man having "made good."

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But everything—everything had fallen out absolutely differently from what he had expected it to do. The influence of Mars, so fatal to millions of his fellow beings, had brought him marvellous, unmerited good fortune. He had rushed home the moment War was declared, and after putting in some time in a training which he hated to remember, he had at last obtained a commission. Within a fortnight of having reached his Mecca—the Front, he was back in England in the—to him—amazing guise of wounded hero. But he had sent for none of his old friends for he was still ashamed. After the Armistice he had rushed through England on his way to Australia, putting in a few days with a Colonel and Mrs. Crofton, with whom he had been thrown in Egypt. More to do his host a kindness than for any other reason, Radmore had sent his godson, Timothy Tosswill, a pedigree puppy, from the queer little Essex manor-house where the Croftons were then making a rather futile attempt to increase their slender means by breeding terriers.

The days had slipped by there very pleasantly, for Radmore liked his taciturn host, and Mrs. Crofton was very pretty—an agreeable playfellow for a rich and lonely man. So it was that when it came to the point he had not cared to look up any of the people associated with his early youth.

But now he was going to see them—almost had he forced himself upon them. And the thought of going home to Old Place shook and stirred him to the heart.

To-day he felt quite queerly at a loose end. This perhaps, partly because the lately widowed Mrs. Crofton, with whom he had spent a good deal of his time since his arrival in London three weeks ago, had left town. She had not gone far, only to the Surrey village where he himself was going on Friday.

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When pretty Mrs. Crofton had told Radmore that she had taken a house at Beechfield, he had been very much surprised and taken aback. It had seemed to him an amazing coincidence that the one place in the wide world which to him was home should have been chosen by her. But at once she had reminded him, in her pretty little positive way, that it was he himself who, soon after they had become first acquainted in Egypt, had drawn such an attractive picture of the Surrey village. That, in fact, was why, in July—it was now late September—when she, Enid Crofton, had had to think of making a new home, Beechfield had seemed to her the ideal place. If only she could hear of a house to let there! And by rare good chance there had been such a house—The Trellis House! A friend had lent her a motor, and she had gone down to look at it one August afternoon, and there and then had decided to take it. It was so exactly what she wanted—a delightful, old, cottagy place, yet with all modern conveniences, lacking, alas! only electric light.

All this had happened, so she had explained, after her last letter to him, for she and Radmore had kept up a desultory correspondence.

And now, with Janet Tosswill's voice still sounding in his ears, Godfrey Radmore was not altogether sorry to feel a touch of loneliness, for at times his good fortune frightened him.

Not only had he escaped through the awful ordeal of war with only one bad wound, while many of his friends and comrades—the best and bravest, the most happily young, had fallen round him—but he had come back to find himself transformed from a penniless adventurer into a very rich man. An old Brisbane millionaire, into whose office he had drifted in the January of 1914, and with whom he had, after a fashion, made friends, had re-made his will in the memorable autumn of that year,

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and had left Radmore half his vast fortune. Doubtless many such wills were made under the stress of war emotion, but—and it was here that Radmore's strange luck had come in—the maker of this particular will had died within a month of making it. And, as so often happens to a man who had begun by losing what little he had owing to folly and extravagance, Godfrey Radmore, though exceptionally generous and kindly, now lived well within his means, and had, if anything, increased his already big share of this world's goods.

Now that he was home for good, he intended to buy a nice old-fashioned house with a little shooting, and perchance a little fishing. The place, though not at Land's End, must yet not be so near London that a fellow would be tempted to be always going to town. It seemed to him amazing that he now had it within his power to achieve what had always been his ideal. But when he had acquired exactly the kind of place he wanted to find, what those whom he had set seeking for him had assured him with such flattering and eager earnestness he would very soon discover—what then? Did he mean to live there alone? He thought yes, for he did not now feel drawn to marriage.

As a boy—it now seemed æons of years ago—it had been far otherwise. But Betty Tosswill had been very young, only nineteen, and when he had fallen on evil days she had thrown him over in obedience to her father's strongly expressed wish. He had suffered what at the time seemed a frightful agony, and he had left England full of revolt and bitterness.

But to-day, when the knowledge that he was so soon going to Beechfield brought with it a great surge of remembrance, he could not honestly tell himself that he was sorry. Had he gone out to Australia burdened with a girl-wife, the difficult struggle would have been well-nigh

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intolerable, and it was a million to one chance that he would ever have met the man to whom he owed his present good fortune. What he now longed to do was to enjoy himself in a simple, straightforward way. Love, with its tremors, uncertainties, its blisses and torments, was not for him, and in so far as he might want a pleasant touch of half sentimental, half sexless comradeship, there was his agreeable friendship with Mrs. Crofton.

Enid Crofton? The thought of how well he had come to know her in the last three weeks surprised him. When he had first met her in Egypt she had been the young, very pretty wife of Colonel Crofton, an elderly "dug-out," odd and saturnine, whose manner to his wife was not always over-kindly. No one out there had been much surprised when she had decided to brave the submarine peril and return to England.

Radmore had not been the only man who had felt sorry for her, and who had made friends with her. But unlike the other men, who were all more or less in love with her, he had liked Colonel Crofton. During his visit to Fildy Fe Manor, the liking had hardened into serious regard. He had been surprised, rather distressed, to find how much less well-off they had appeared here, at home, than when the Colonel had been on so-called active service. It had also become plain to him—though he was not a man to look out for such things—that the husband and wife were now on very indifferent terms, the one with the other, and, on the whole, he blamed the wife —and then, just before he had started for home again, had come the surprising news of Colonel Crofton's death!

In her letter to one who was, after all, only an acquaintance, the young widow had gone into no details. But, just by chance, Radmore had seen a paragraph in a week-old London paper containing an account of the

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inquest. Colonel Crofton had committed suicide, a result, it was stated, of depression owing to shell-shock. "Shell-shock" gave Radmore pause. He felt quite sure that Colonel Crofton had never—to use a now familiar paraphrase—heard a shot fired in anger. The fact that his war service had been far from the Front had always been a subject of bitter complaint on the old soldier's part.

Radmore had written a sympathetic note to Mrs. Crofton, telling her the date of his return, and now—almost without his knowing how and why—they had become intimate, meeting almost daily, lunching or dining together incessantly, Radmore naturally gratified at the admiration his lovely companion—she had grown even prettier since he had last seen her—obviously excited.

And yet, though he had become such "pals" with her, and though he missed her society at his now lonely meals to an almost ridiculous extent, Radmore would have been much taken aback had an angel from heaven told him that the real reason he had sought to get in touch with Old Place was because Enid Crofton had already settled down at Beechfield.

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CHAPTER III

AFTER Timmy Tosswill had been to the village shop and done his mother's errand, he wandered on, his dog, Flick, at his heels, debating within himself what he should do next.

Like most children who lead an abnormal, because a lonely, childhood, he was in some ways very mature, in other ways still very babyish. He was at once secretive and—whenever anything touched his heart—emotionally expansive. To the indifferent observer Timmy appeared to be an exceptionally intelligent, naughty, rather spoilt little boy, too apt to take every advantage of a certain physical delicacy. This was also the view taken of him by his half-brothers, and by two out of his three step-sisters. But the three who really loved him, his mother, his nurse, and his eldest half-sister, Betty, were convinced that the child was either possessed of a curious, uncanny gift of—was it second sight?—as his old nurse entirely and his mother half, believed, or, as Dr. O'Farrell asserted, some abnormal development of his subconscious self. All three were ruefully aware that Timmy was often—well, his mother called it "sly," his sister called it "fanciful," his nurse by the good old nursery term, "deceitful."

It was this unlovable attribute of his which made it so difficult to know whether Timmy believed in the positive assertions occasionally made by him concerning his intimate acquaintance with the world of the unseen. That he could sometimes visualise what was coming to pass, especially if it was of an unpleasant, disturbing nature,

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was, so his mother considered, an undeniable fact. But sometimes the gift lay in abeyance for weeks, even for months. That had been the case, as Mrs. Tosswill had told Dr. O'Farrell, for a long time now—to be precise, since March, when, to the dismay of those about him he had predicted an accident in the hunting field which actually took place.

Timmy walked on up the steep bit of road which led to the upper part of the beautiful old village which was, like many an English village, shaped somewhat like a horse-shoe—and then suddenly he stopped and gazed intently into a walled stable-yard of which the big gates were wide open.

Beechfield was Timmy Tosswill's world in little. He was passionately interested in all that concerned its inhabitants, and was a familiar and constant, though not always a welcome visitor to every cottage. Most of the older village men and women had a certain grudging affection for the odd little boy. They were all well aware of, and believed in, the gift which made him, as the nurse had once explained to a crony of hers, "see things which are not there," though not one of them would have cared to mention it to him.

Timmy had a special reason for wishing to know what was going on in this stable-yard, so, after a moment's thought, he walked deliberately through the gates as if he had some business there, and then he saw that two men, one of whom was a stranger to him, were tidying up the place in a very leisurely, thoroughgoing manner.

The back door of The Trellis House, as the quaint-looking, long, low building to the right was incongruously named, opened into the stable-yard and by the door was a bench. Timmy walked boldly across the yard and established himself on the bench and his dog, Flick,

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jumped up and sat sedately by him. The little boy then took a small black book out of his pocket. The book was called "The Crofton Boys" and Timmy had chosen it because the name of the new tenant of The Trellis House was Mrs. Crofton, a friend, as he was aware, of his godfather, Godfrey Radmore. He wondered if she had any boys.

The two men, busy with big new brooms, came up close to where Timmy was sitting. When the child, obviously "one of the gentry," had walked into the stable-yard, they had abruptly stopped talking; but now, seeing that he was reading intently, and apparently quite uninterested in what they were doing, they again began speaking to one another, or rather one of them, a hard-bitten, shrewd-looking man, much the older of the two, began talking in what was, though Timmy was not aware of it, a Cockney dialect.

"You won't find 'er a bad 'un to work for, m'lad. I speak of folks as I find them. I'm not one to take any notice of queer tales!"

"Queer tales. What be the queer tales, Mister Piper?"

Timmy knew this last speaker. He was the baker's rather sharp younger son, and Mrs. Crofton had just engaged him as handy man.

The older man lowered his voice a little, but Timmy, who, while his eyes seemed glued to the pages of the book he held open, was yet listening with all his ears, heard what followed quite clearly.

"It ain't for me to spread ill tales after what I've told you, eh? But the Colonel's death was a reg'lar tragedy, 'twas, and some there were who said that 'is widder wasn't exactly sorry. 'E were a melancholy cove for any young woman to 'ave to live with. But there, as my old mother used to say, 'any old barn-door can keep out the draught!' "

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The younger man looked up:—"What sort o' tragedy?" he asked.

"The Colonel pizened 'isself, and the question was—did 'e do it o' purpose? Some said yes, and some said no. I was in it by a manner of speaking."

"You was in it?"

The boy left off working, and gazed at the other eagerly:—"D'you mean you saw him do it?"

"I was the first to see 'im in his agony—I calls that being in it. And I was called upon to give evidence at the inquest held on the corpse."

The man looked round him furtively as he spoke. The little boy sitting by the back door of the house caused him no concern, but he did not want what he said to be overheard by the two new maïd-servants who had arrived at The Trellis House that morning.

"There's always a lot of talk when folks die sudden," he went on, in a sententious tone. "It was as plain as the nose on your face that the Colonel, poor chap, 'ad 'ad what they called shell-shock. I'd heard 'im a-talking aloud to 'isself many a time. 'E was a-weary of life 'e was. So 'tis plain 'e just thought 'e'd put an end to it, like many a better man afore 'im."

And then the youth said something that rather surprised himself, but his mind had been working while the other had been talking.

"Did anyone say different?" was his question and the other answered in a curious tone: "Now you're askin'! Yes, there was some folk as did say different. They argued that the Colonel never took the pizen knowingly. 'E was very keen over terriers—we bred 'em. The best of 'em, a grand sire, was the very spit of that little dawg sitting up on that there bench. Colonel bred 'em for profit, not pleasure. Mrs. Crofton, she 'ated 'em, and she lost no time either in getting rid of 'em after 'e was

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gone. They got on 'er nerves, same as 'e'd done. She give the best—prize-winner 'e was—to the Crowner as tried the corpse. 'E'd known 'em both—was a bit sweet on 'er 'isself."

The youth laughed discordantly. "Ho! Ho! She's that sort, is she?"

But the other spoke up at once with a touch of sharpness in his voice.

"She's a good sort to them as be'aves themselves, my lad. She give me a good present. Got me a good, new soft place, too, that's where I'm going to-morrer. I'm 'ere to oblige 'er, that's what I am—just to put you, young man, in the way of things. Look sharp, please 'er, mind your manners, and you may end better off than you know!"

The lad looked at the speaker with a gleam of rather hungry curiosity in his lack-lustre eyes.

"Mark my words! Your missus won't be a widder long. Ever 'eard of a Major Radmore?"

The speaker did not notice that the little boy sitting on the bench stiffened unconsciously.

"Major Radmore?" repeated the listener. "Folk in Beechfield did know a chap called Radmore. Lives in Australia, he does. He sent home some money for a village club 'e did, but nothing 'as been done about it yet. Some do say old Tosswill's sticking to the cash—a gent as what they calls trustee of it all. But then who'd trust anyone with a load o' money? The chap I'm thinking of used to live at Tosswill's a matter of ten years ago."

"Then 'tis the same one!" exclaimed the other eagerly, "and, if so, you'll not lack good things. Likely as not the Major's your future master. 'E's got plenty, and a generous soul too. Gave me a present last year when he was a stopping at Fildy Fe Manor. The Major, 'e bought one of our dawgs, and I sent it off for 'im to Old

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Place, Beechfield, damn me if I don't remember it now—name of Tosswill too." He stopped short, and then, as if he had thought better of what he was going to say, he observed musingly: "Some says Jack Piper's a blabber—but they don't know me! But one thing I'll tell you. The're two after the Missus, for all the Colonel's 'ardly cold, so to speak, but I put my money on the dark one."

He had hardly uttered these cryptic words when a pretty young woman opened the door which gave on to the stable-yard from the house: "Dinner-time!" she called out merrily.

Both men dropped the brooms they were holding, and going towards the door disappeared.

As they did so, Timmy heard the words:—"*She's* a peach—thinks herself one too—oh! the merry widder!"

The little boy waited a moment. He took a long look round the sunny, and now unnaturally tidy, stable-yard. Then he got up, shut his book, and put it sedately into his pocket. Flick seemed unwilling to move, so Timmy turned and called sharply:—"Flick! come along at once!"

The dog jumped down and ran up to his master. Timmy walked across the big, flat, white stones, kicking a pebble as he went. At last, when he got close to the open gate, he hop-scotched, propelling the pebble far into the road.

He was extremely disturbed and surprised. He went over and over again what he had heard the two men say. The absurd suspicion of his father filled him with angry hurt disgust. Why only yesterday the plan of the village clubhouse had come from the architect! And then that extraordinary disconcerting hint about his godfather? Godfrey Radmore belonged in Timmy's imagination, first to himself, secondly to his parents, and then, in a much less close way, to the rest of the Tosswill family. A sensation of strong dislike to the still unknown

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new tenant of The Trellis House welled up in his secretive little heart, and instead of going on round the village, he turned back and made his way straight home.

As he walked along the short avenue which led to the front door of Old Place he saw his mother kneeling on her gardening mat. He stepped up on to the grass hoping to elude her sharp eyes and ears, but she had already seen him.

"Hullo, Timmy!" she called out cheerfully. "What have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

"I've been sitting reading in the stable-yard of The Trellis House."

"That seems rather a funny thing to do, when you might have been here helping your Mummy," but she said the words very kindly. Then suddenly the mention of The Trellis House reminded her of Godfrey Radmore. "I've got a great piece of news!" she exclaimed. "Guess who's coming here to spend the week-end with us, Timmy?"

He looked at her gravely and said:—"I think I know, Mum."

She felt taken aback, as she so often was with her strange little son.

"I don't think you do," she cried briskly.

"I think it's"—he hesitated a moment—"Major Radmore, my godfather."

She was very, very surprised. Then her quick Scotch mind fastened on the one unfamiliar word. "Why *Major* Radmore?" she asked.

Timmy looked a little confused. "I—I don't know," he muttered unwillingly. "I thought he was a soldier, Mum."

"Of course he *was* a soldier. But he isn't a soldier now."

"Isn't it tea-time?" asked Timmy suddenly.

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"Yes, I suppose it is."

As they walked towards the house together Janet was telling herself uneasily that unless Timmy had met Dr. O'Farrell, it was impossible for him to have learnt through any ordinary human agency that Godfrey Radmore was coming to Beechfield. Though a devoted, she was not a blind mother, and she was disagreeably aware that her little son never "gave himself away." She did not wish to start him on a long romancing explanation which would embody—if one were to put it in bald English—a lie. So she said nothing.

They were close to the door of the house when he again took her aback by suddenly saying:—"I don't think Mrs. Crofton can be a very nice sort of lady, Mum."

(Then he had seen Mrs. Crofton, and *she* had told him.)

"Why not, Timmy?"

"I have a sort of feeling that she's horrid."

"Nonsense! If only for your godfather's sake, we must all try and like her. Besides, my boy, she's in great trouble. Her husband only died two or three months ago."

"Some people aren't sorry when their husbands die," remarked Timmy.

She pretended not to hear. But as they walked through into the hall she heard him say as if to himself: "Some people are glad. Mrs. George Pott"—the woman who kept the local beer-shop—"danced when *her* husband died."

"I wish, Timmy," said his mother sharply, that you would not listen to, or repeat low village gossip."

"Not even if it's true, Mum?"

"No, not even if it's true."

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When Janet had first come to Old Place as a bride, eager to shoulder what some of her friends had told her would be an almost intolerable burden, her husband's six children had been a sad, subdued, nursery-brought-up group, infinitely pathetic to her warm Scotch heart. At once she had instituted, rather to the indignation of the old nurse who was yet to become in due time her devoted henchwoman, a daily dining-room tea, and the custom still persisted.

And now, to Timmy's surprise, his mother opened the drawing-room door instead of going on to the dining-room. "Tell Betty," she said abruptly, "to pour out tea. I'll come on presently."

She shut the door, and going over to the roomy old sofa, sat down, and leaning back, closed her eyes. It was a very unusual thing for her to do, but she felt tired, and painfully excited at the thought of Godfrey Radmore's coming visit. And as she lay there, there rose up before her, wearily and despondently, the changes which nine years had brought to Old Place.

Janet Tosswill, like all intelligent stepmothers, sometimes speculated as to what her predecessor had really been like. Her husband's elder children were so amazingly unlike one another, as well as utterly unlike her own son Timmy.

Betty, the eldest of her stepchildren, was her favourite, and she had also been deeply attached to Betty's twin-brother, George. The two had been alike in many ways, though Betty was very feminine and George essentially masculine, and each of them had possessed those special human attributes which only War seems to bring to full fruition.

George had been out in France seven months when he had been killed at Beaumont Hamel, and he had already won a bar to his Military Cross by an action which in

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any other campaign would have given him the Victoria Cross. As for Betty, she had shown herself extraordinarily brave, cool, and resourceful when after doing some heavy home war work, she had gone out with one of the units of the Scottish Women's Hospital.

But Janet Tosswill admired and loved the girl more than ever since Betty had come back, from what had perforce been a full and exciting life, to take up the dull, everyday routine existence at Old Place where, what with a bad investment, high prices, and the sudden leap in the income-tax, from living pleasantly at ease they had become most unpleasantly poor.

Jack, who came next to Betty, though a long way after, and who had just missed being in the war, was a very different type of young Englishman from what George had been. He was clever, self-assertive, and already known as a brilliant debater and as a sound speaker at the Oxford Union. There need be no trouble as to Jack Tosswill's future—he was going to the Bar, and there was little doubt that he would succeed there. One of his idiosyncrasies was his almost contemptuous indifference to women. He was fond of his sisters in a patronising way, but the average pleasant girl, of whom the neighbourhood of Beechfield had more than its full share, left him quite cold.

The next in age—Dolly—was the most commonplace member of the family. Her character seemed to be set on absolutely conventional lines, and the whole family, with the exception of her father, who did not concern himself with such mundane things, secretly hoped that she would marry a young parson who had lately "made friends with her." As is often the case with that type of young woman, Dolly was feckless about money, and would always have appeared badly and unsuitably dressed but for the efforts of her elder sister and stepmother.

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Rosamund, the youngest and by far the prettiest of the three sisters, was something of a problem. Though two years younger than Dolly, she had already had three or four love affairs, and when only sixteen, had been the heroine of a painful scrape—the sort of scrape which the people closely concerned try determinedly to forget, but which everyone about them remembers to his or her dying day.

The hero of that sorry escapade had been a man of forty, separated from his wife. On the principle that "truth will out even in an affidavit," poor Rosamund's little world was well aware that the girl, or rather the child, had been simply vain and imprudent. But still, she had disappeared for two terrible long days and nights, and even now, when anything recalled the episode to her stepmother or to Betty, they would shudder with an awful inward tremor, recollecting what they had both gone through. That she had come back as silly and innocent a girl as she had left, and feeling as much shame as she was capable of feeling, had been owing to the tardily awakened sense of prudence and honour in the man to whom she had run away in a fit of temper after a violent quarrel with—of all people in the world—her brother Jack.

Rosamund now ardently desired to become an actress, and after much secret discussion with his wife, her father had at last told her that if she were of the same opinion when she reached the age of twenty-one he would put no obstacle in her way.

As to Tom, the youngest of Janet Tosswill's step-children, he was "quite all right." Though only fifteen months younger than Rosamund, whereas she was as much of a woman as she ever would be, he was still a cheery, commonplace schoolboy. He had been such a baby when Janet had married that sometimes she almost

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felt as if he were her own child and that though Tom's relation to her own son was peculiar. Theoretically the two boys ought to have been pals, or at any rate good friends. But in practice they were like oil and water—and found it impossible to mix. When Tom was at home, as now, on his holidays, he spent most of his time with a schoolfellow of his own age who lived about two miles from Beechfield. In some ways Timmy was older now than Tom would ever be.

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CHAPTER IV

TIMMY went on into the dining-room to find his brothers and sisters all gathered there excepting Dolly. But as he sat down, and as Betty began to pour out tea, Dolly came in from the garden with the words:—

"Guess who I've met and had a talk with?"

She looked round her eagerly, but no one ventured an opinion. There were so many, many people whom Dolly might have met and had a talk with, for she was the most gregarious member of the Tosswill family.

At last Timmy spoke up:—"I expect you've seen Mrs. Crofton," he observed, his mouth already full of bread and butter.

Dolly was taken aback. "How did you know?" she cried. "But it's quite true—I *have* seen Mrs. Crofton!"

"What is she like?" asked Jack indifferently.

"How old is she?" This from Betty, who somehow always seemed to ask the essential question.

"D'you think she'll prove a 'stayer'?" questioned Tom.

He had hoped that someone with a family of boys and girls would have come to The Trellis House. It was a beautiful little building—the oldest dwelling-house in the village, in spite of its early Victorian name. But no one ever stayed there very long. Some of the older village folk said it was haunted.

"Did you speak to her, or did she speak to you?" asked Rosamund.

And then again Timmy intervened.

"I know more about her than any one of you do. But I don't mean to tell you what I know," he announced.

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No one took any notice of him. By common consent efforts were always made in the family circle to keep Timmy down—but such efforts were rarely successful.

"Well, tell us what's she like?" exclaimed Rosamund. "I did so hope we should escape another widow."

She had hoped for a nice, well-to-do couple, with at least one grown-up son preferably connected, in some way, with the stage.

Dolly Tosswill, still standing, looked down at her audience.

"She's quite unlike what I thought she would be," she began. "For one thing, she's quite young, and she's awfully pretty and unusual-looking. You'd notice her anywhere."

"Did you meet her in the post-office?" asked Betty.

"No, at church. She only arrived this morning, and she said she felt so lonely and miserable that when she heard the bell ring she thought she'd go along and see what our church was like."

"Oh, then she's 'pi'?" in a tone of disgust from Rosamund.

"I'd noticed her in church, though she was sitting rather back, close to the door," went on Dolly, "and I'd wondered who she was, as she looked so very unlike any of the Beechfield people."

"How do you mean—unlike?" asked Tom.

"I can't explain exactly. I thought she was a summer visitor. And then something so funny happened——"

Dolly was sitting down now, and Betty handed her a cup of tea, grieving the while to see how untidy she looked with her hat tilted back at an unbecoming angle.

"What happened?"

"Well, as we came out of the church together, all at once that old, half-blind, post-office dog made straight for her! He gave a most awful howl, and she was so

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frightened that she ran back into the church again. But of course I didn't know she was Mrs. Crofton *then*. I got the dog into the post-office garden and then I went back into the church to tell her the coast was clear. But she waited a bit, for she was awfully afraid that he might get out again."

"What a goose she must be"—this from Jack.

"She asked if she were likely to meet any other dog in the road; so I asked her where she lived, and then she told me she was Mrs. Crofton, and that she had only arrived this morning. I offered to walk home with her, and then we had quite a talk. She has the same kind of feeling about dogs that some people have about cats."

"That's rather queer!" said Tom suddenly, "for her husband bred wire-haired terriers. Colonel Crofton sold Flick to Godfrey Radmore last year — don't you remember?"

He appealed to Betty, who always remembered everything.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I was just thinking of that. Colonel Crofton wrote Timmy such a nice letter telling him how to manage Flick. It does seem strange that she should have that feeling about dogs."

Again Timmy's shrill voice rose in challenge. "I should hate *my* wife not to like dogs," he cried pugnaciously.

"It'll take you all your time to make her like *you*, old man," observed Tom.

"I've asked her in to supper to-night," went on Dolly, in her slow, deliberate way, "so we shall have to have Flick locked up."

"Whatever made you ask her to supper, Doll?" asked Jack sharply.

Jack Tosswill had a hard, rather limited nature, but he was very fond of his home, and unlike most young men,

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he had a curious dislike to the presence of strangers there. This was unfortunate, for his stepmother was very hospitable, and even now, though life had become a real struggle as to ways and means, she often asked people in to meals.

"Her cook didn't turn up," exclaimed Dolly. "And when she asked me if I knew of any woman in the village who could come in and cook dinner for her this evening, I said I was sure Janet would like her to come in and have supper."

"And I hope," chimed in Rosamund decidedly, "that we shall all dress for dinner. Why should she think us a hugger-mugger family?"

"I don't mean to change. I shall only wash my hands!" This from Timmy, who was always allowed to sit up to dinner. His brothers and sisters were too fond of their stepmother to say how absurdly uncalled-for they thought this privilege.

As everyone pretended not to have heard his remark, Timmy repeated obstinately: "I shall only wash my hands."

"Mrs. Crofton won't care how *you* look," observed Jack irritably. "If we didn't now live in such a huggery-muggery way, I should always dress. I do everywhere else."

Betty looked at him, and her face deadened. Though she would hardly have admitted it, even to herself, she regretted the way in which everything at Old Place was now allowed to go "slack." She knew it to be bad for her sisters. It wasn't as if they did any real housework or gave useful help in the kitchen. Dolly tried to do so in a desultory way, but in the end it was she, Betty, who kept everything going in this big, rambling old house, with the help of the old nurse and a day girl from the village.

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Timmy gave a little cackle, and Jack felt annoyed. He looked across at his half-brother with a feeling akin to dislike. But Jack Tosswill was truly attached to his stepmother. He was old enough to remember what a change she had made in the then dull, sad, austere Old Place. Janet had at once thrown herself into the task of being sister, rather than stepmother, to her husband's children, and bountifully had she succeeded!

Still, with the exception of Betty, they all criticised her severely, in their hearts, for her weakness where her own child was concerned. And yet poor Janet never made the slightest difference between Timmy and the others. It was more the little boy's own clever insistence which got him his own way, and secured him certain privileges which they, at his age, had never enjoyed. Timmy also always knew how to manage his delicate, nervous father. John Tosswill realised that Timmy might some day grow up to do him credit. Timmy really loved learning, and it was a pleasure to the scholar to teach his clever, impish, youngest son.

Meanwhile Janet, who had remained on in the drawing-room, got up from the sofa and, going into the corridor, opened the dining-room door. For some moments she stood there, unseen, watching the eager party gathered round the table, and as she did so, she looked with a curious, yearning feeling at each of the young folk in turn.

How changed, how utterly changed, they all were since Godfrey Radmore had last been in that familiar room! The least changed, of course, was Betty. To her stepmother's partial eyes, Betty Tosswill, at twenty-eight, was still an extraordinarily charming and young-looking creature. Had her nose been rather less retroussé, her generous, full-lipped mouth just a little smaller, her

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brown hair either much darker, or really fair, as was Rosamund's, she would have been exceptionally pretty. What to the discriminating made her so much more attractive than either of her younger sisters was her look of intelligence and quiet humour. But of course she looked not only older, but different, from what she had looked nine years ago. Betty had lived a full and, in a sense, a tragic life during four of the years which had elapsed since she and Radmore had parted in this very room.

Janet's eyes travelled past Betty to Jack. Just at that moment he was looking with no very pleasant expression across at his little brother, and yet there was something softer than usual in his cold, clear-cut face. Janet Tosswill would have been touched and surprised indeed had she known that it was the thought of herself that had brought that look on Jack's face. Jack was twenty-one, but looked like a man of thirty—he was so set, he knew so exactly what he wanted of life. As she looked at him, she wondered doubtfully whether he would ever make that great career his schoolmaster had so confidently predicted for him. He was so—so—she could only find the word "conventional" to describe him.

Janet Tosswill passed over Dolly quickly. To-day Dolly looked a little different from the others, for she was wearing a hat, and it was clear that she had just come in from the village. Her stepmother noticed with dissatisfaction that the over large brooch fastening Dolly's blouse was set in awry, and that there were wisps of loose hair lying on her neck.

As for Rosamund, she looked ill-humoured, frankly bored to-day—but oh, how pretty and dainty, next to the commonplace Dolly! Rosamund's gleaming fair hair curled naturally all over her head; she had lovely,

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startled-looking eyes which went oddly with a very determined, if beautifully moulded, mouth and chin.

Betty was convinced that, given a chance, Rosamund would make a success on the stage, but Betty was prejudiced. There had always been a curious link of sympathy between the two sisters, utterly different as they were, and many as were the years that separated them.

Tom was the only one of the flock who presented no problem. He was far more human than Jack, but, like Jack, absolutely steady and dependable.

Janet Tosswill's mind swung back to Godfrey Radmore. She wondered how he would like the changes in Old Place, whether they would affect him pleasantly or otherwise. She was woman enough to regret sharply their altered way of life. When Godfrey had lived in Old Place, there had been a good cook, a capable parlourmaid, and a well-trained housemaid, as well as a bright-faced "tweenie" there, and life had rolled along as if on wheels. It was very different now.

She wondered if Betty or Timmy had told the others of Radmore's coming visit. It was so strange, in a way, so painful to know that to most of them, with the possible exception of Jack, he was only a name.

Suddenly Betty, turning around, saw her stepmother. "Dolly has met Mrs. Crofton, and she's utterly unlike what any of us thought she would be!" she cried out. "She's young, and very pretty—quite lovely in fact! Dolly asked her into supper to-night, as her cook has not yet arrived."

She had a sort of prevision that Janet was now going to tell the others about Godfrey Radmore, and she wanted to get away out of the room first. But this was not to be. Janet Tosswill had a very positive mind—she was full of what she had come in to say, and the new tenant at The Trellis House interested her not at all, so

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as soon as she had sat down, she exclaimed, "Perhaps Timmy has told you my news?"

Then all turned to her, except Betty and Timmy himself.

"What news?" came in eager chorus.

"Godfrey Radmore is in England. He telephoned from London just now, and he's coming down on Friday to spend a long week-end!"

Rosamund was the only one who stole a look at Betty.

"Godfrey Radmore here?" repeated Jack slowly. "It's queer he would want to come—after the odd way he's behaved to us."

"Yes, it is rather strange," Janet tried to speak lightly. "But there it is! The whole world has turned topsy-turvy since any of us saw him last."

"I wonder if he's still very rich," went on Jack.

Janet Tosswill felt startled. "Why shouldn't he be?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know—it only occurred to me that he might have lost some of this money in the same way that he lost that first fortune of his."

"It wasn't a fortune"—Betty's quiet voice broke in very decidedly—"and most of it was lost by a friend of his, not by Godfrey himself at all. He was too proud to say anything about it to father, but he wrote and told George."

A curious stillness fell over the company of young people. They were all in their different ways very much surprised, for Betty never mentioned her twin-brother. All at once they each remembered about Betty and Godfrey—all except Timmy, who had never been told.

"And now what's this about Mrs. Crofton?" asked Janet at last, breaking a silence that had become oppressive. "Do I understand that she's coming to supper tonight?"

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It was Betty who answered: "I hope you don't mind? Dolly thought it the only thing to do, as the poor woman's cook hadn't arrived.

"We mustn't forget to ask her in for lunch or dinner on one of the days that Godfrey is here," observed Janet. "I gather they're friends. He asked if she'd already come."

Timmy was supposed to prepare his lessons between tea and dinner, but unlike the ordinary boy, he much preferred to wake early and work before breakfast. This was considered not good for his health, and there was a constant struggle between himself and his determined mother to force him to do the normal thing. So after she had finished her tea, she beckoned to her son, and he unwillingly got up and followed her into the drawing-room. But before he could settle down at his own special table Betty came in.

"Janet, I want to ask you something before I go into the village. There are one or two things we must get in, if Mrs. Crofton is coming this evening——"

The little boy did not wait to hear his mother's answer. He crept very quietly out of the open window, which was close to his table, and then made his way round to the first of the long French windows of the dining-room. He was just in time to hear his brother Tom ask in a very solemn tone: "I say, you fellows! Wasn't Betty once engaged to this Radmore chap?"

Timmy, skilfully ensconced behind the full old green damask curtains, listened, with all his ears, for the answer.

"Yes," said Jack at last, with a touch of reluctance. "They were engaged, but not for very long. Still, they'd been fond of one another for an age and George was his greatest friend——"

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Rosamund broke in: "Do tell us what he's like, Jack! I suppose you can remember him quite well?"

Jack hesitated, rather uncomfortably.

"Of course I remember Radmore very well indeed. He had quite a tidy bit of money, as both his parents were dead. His snuffy old guardian had been at Balliol with father. So father was asked to coach him. And then, well, I suppose as time went on, and Betty began growing up, he fell in love with her."

"And she with him?" interposed Rosamund.

"A girl is apt to like any man who likes her," said Jack loftily. "But I believe 'twas he made all the fuss when the engagement was broken off."

"But why was it broken off?" asked Rosamund.

"Because he'd lost all his money racing."

"What a stupid thing to do!" exclaimed Tom.

"The row came during the Easter holidays," went on Jack meditatively, "and there was a fearful dust-up. Like an idiot, Radmore had gone and put the whole of the little bit of money he had saved out of the fire on an outsider he had some reason to think would be bound to romp in first—and the horse was not even placed!"

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Rosamund.

"He rushed down here," went on Jack, "to say that he had made up his mind to go to Australia. And he was simply amazed when father and Janet wouldn't hear of Betty going with him."

"Would she have liked to go?" asked Tom.

"Well, yes—I believe she would. But of course it was out of the question. Father could have given her nothing, even then, so how could they have lived? There was a fearful rumpus, and in the end Godfrey went off in a tearing rage."

"Shaking the dust of Old Place off his indignant feet, eh?" suggested Tom.

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"Yes, all that sort of thing. George was having scarlet fever—in a London hospital—so of course he was quite out of it."

"Then, at last Godfrey reopened communication via Timmy?" suggested the younger boy.

"Timmy's got the letter still," chimed in Rosamund. "I saw it in his play-box the other day. It was rather a funny letter—I read it."

"The devil you did!" from Tom, indignantly.

She went on unruffled:—"He said he'd been left a fortune, and wanted to share it with his godson. How much did he send? D'you remember?" She looked round.

"Five pounds!" said Dolly.

"I wish *I* was his godson," said Tom.

"And then," went on Dolly, in her precise way, "the War came, and nothing more happened till suddenly he wrote again to Timmy from Egypt, and then began the presents. I wonder if we ought to have thanked him for them? After all, we don't *know* that they came from him. The only present we *know* came from him was Flick."

"And a damned silly present, too!" observed Jack, drily.

"Do you think he's still in love with Betty?" asked Rosamund.

"Of course he's not. If he was, he would have written to her, not to Timmy. Nine years is a long time in a man's life," observed Jack sententiously.

"My hat! yes!" exclaimed Tom. "Poor Betty!"

Jack got up, and made a movement as if he were thinking of going out through the window into the garden. So Timmy, with a swift, sinuous movement, withdrew from the curtain, and edging up against the

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outside wall of the house, walked unobtrusively back into the drawing-room.

When his mother—who had gone out to find something for Betty to take into the village—came back, she was pleased and surprised to find her little son working away as if for dear life.

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CHAPTER V

CLOSE on eight that same evening, Timmy Tosswill stood by the open centre window of the long drawing-room, hands duly washed, and his generally short, rough, untidy hair well brushed, whistling softly to himself.

He was longing intensely for his godfather's arrival, and it seemed such a long time off to Friday. A photograph of Radmore, in uniform, sent him at his own request two years ago, was the boy's most precious personal possession. Timmy was a careful, almost uncannily thrifty child, with quite a lot of money in the Savings Bank, but he had taken out 10/- in order to buy a frame for the photograph, and it rested, alone in its glory, on the top of the chest of drawers that stood opposite his bed.

There had been a time when Timmy had hoped that he would grow up to look like his godfather, but now he was aware that this hope would never be fulfilled, for Radmore, in this photograph, at any rate, had a strongly-featured, handsome face, very unlike what his mother had once called "Timmy's wizened little phiz."

It seemed strange to care for a person you had never seen since you were a tiny child—but there it was! To Timmy everything that touched his godfather was of far greater moment than he would have admitted to anyone. Radmore was his secret hero; and now, to-night, he asked himself painfully, why had his hero left off loving Betty? The story he had overheard this afternoon had deeply impressed him. For the first time he

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began to dimly apprehend the strange and piteous tangle we call life.

Suddenly there broke on the still autumn air the distant sound of sharp barks and piteous whines. Much against his will, the little boy had had to bow to the edict that Flick should be shut up in the stable. Dolly, who so seldom bothered about anything, had seen to this herself, because Mrs. Crofton, who was coming to supper, hated dogs. Timmy inhospitably hoped that the new tenant of The Trellis House would very seldom honour Old Place with a visit. It would be impossible for them always to hide Flick away like this!

He moved further into the pretty, old-fashioned room. Like most old-fashioned country drawing-rooms of the kind, it was rather over-full of furniture and ornaments. The piano jutted out at right angles to a big, roomy sofa, which could, at a pinch, hold seven or eight people, the pinch usually being when, for the benefit of Timmy, the sofa was supposed to be a stage coach of long ago on its way to London. The Tosswills had been great people for private theatricals, charades, and so on—Timmy's own mother being a really good actress and an excellent mimic, but she did not often now indulge in an exhibition of her powers.

At last Timmy looked round at the clock. It was ten minutes to eight, and his mother would not be down for another five minutes. So he went back to the window. All at once he saw in the gathering twilight, two people walking up the avenue which led to the house. The little boy felt surprised. "Who can they be?" was his immediate thought.

As far as he could make out the one was an elderly-looking gentleman—Timmy could just see the rough grey Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers—by whose side there walked, sedately, a wire-haired terrier. What an

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extraordinary thing! Surely that dog, walking by the stranger, was *Flick*—Flick, having escaped from the stable, and behaving for all the world as if the stranger were his master. But again there fell on his ears Flick's distant squeals of anger and annoyance and he felt a queer sensation of relief.

Timmy turned his attention to the other figure, that of the young lady who, dressed all in black, tripped gracefully along by the side of her companion. Evidently some tiresome old gentleman, and his equally tiresome daughter. He told himself crossly that his absent-minded, kind-hearted father, or his incurably hospitable mother, forgetting all about Mrs. Crofton, had asked these two people in to supper. If that was so, Timmy, who was as much at home in the kitchen as in the drawing-room, knew that there would not be quite enough to go round comfortably. This was all the more irritating, as he himself was looking forward to-night to tasting, for the first time, an especially delicious dish. This was lobster pie, for which Old Place had been famed before the War, but which, owing to the present price of lobsters, was among the many delightful things which the War had caused to vanish from poor little Timmy's world. One of the few sensible people in the world who know what other people really like in the way of a present had sent by parcels-post a lot of lobsters to Timmy's mother —hence the coming lobster pie to-night.

Realising that the strangers must be very near the front door by now, he edged towards the door of the drawing-room, meaning to make a bolt for it into what was still called the schoolroom. He did not wish to be caught by himself in the drawing-room. But he was caught, for the door suddenly opened, and his mother came in.

Janet Tosswill "paid for dressing" as the old saying

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is. She looked charming to-night, in a rather bright blue evening dress, and Timmy, slipping his hand into hers, said softly: "You do look nice, Mum."

She smiled, touched and pleased, for her child was not given to compliments. Also, she had told herself, when glancing at her slim, active figure in the early Victorian cheval glass which had belonged to her husband's mother, that this blue dress was really *very* old-fashioned, and would probably appear so to Mrs. Crofton.

In view of Timmy's pleasant compliment, she did not like to ask him if he had washed his hands and brushed his hair. She could only hope for the best: "I hope we shall like Mrs. Crofton," she said meditatively. "You know she's a friend of your godfather, my dear."

"Yes, I know that," he announced, in rather an odd voice, and she felt just a little surprised. How did Timmy know that? Then she remembered her husband had read aloud Mrs. Crofton's pretty, well-turned letter—the letter which explained that the writer was looking out for a country house, and would like to find one at Beechfield if possible, as her friend, Godfrey Radmore, had described it as being the most beautiful village in England.

Timmy let go his mother's hand—then he looked searchingly into her face: "Do you suppose," he asked, "that my godfather is in love with Mrs. Crofton?"

She was taken aback, and yes, shocked, by the question: "Of course not. Whatever put such an extraordinary idea into your head, Timmy?"

The words had hardly left her lips when the door opened, and the village girl, who was staying on for two hours beyond her usual time because of this visitor, announced in a breathless voice:—"Mrs. Crofton, ma'am."

Timmy saw at once that the visitor was the young lady he had seen walking up the avenue. Then the old

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gentleman and his dog—the dog which was so extraordinarily like Flick—had only brought her as far as the door. And then, while his mother was shaking hands with Mrs. Crofton, and shepherding her towards the sofa, Timmy managed to have a good, long look at the new tenant of The Trellis House.

Grudgingly he admitted to himself that she was what most people—such people, for instance, as Rosamund and Betty—would call "very pretty."

Mrs. Crofton had a small three-cornered face, a ridiculously little, babyish mouth, and a great deal of dark, curly hair which matched in a queer kind of way the color of her big, pathetic-looking eyes. Timmy told himself at once that he did not like her—that she looked "a muff." It distressed him to think that his hero should be a friend of this weak-looking, sly little thing—for so he uncompromisingly described Enid Crofton to himself.

Hostess and guest sat down on the big, roomy sofa, while Timmy moved away and opened a book. He was afraid lest his mother should invite him to leave the room, for he wanted to hear what they were saying. Timmy always enjoyed hearing grown-up people's conversation, especially when they had forgotten that he was present. All at once his sharp ears heard Mrs. Crofton's low, melodious voice asking the question he had been half-expecting her to ask: "Do you expect Mr. Radmore soon?"

"Yes, he's coming down on Friday." There was a pause, then Timmy heard his mother say: "Have you known Godfrey Radmore long?"

Janet really wanted to know. Somehow, she found it difficult to imagine a friendship between Godfrey and this little fribble of a woman. But as to that, Janet Tosswill showed less than her usual intelligence. She

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still thought of Godfrey Radmore as of the rather raw, awkward, though clear-headed and determined lad of twenty-three—the Radmore, that is, of nine years ago.

"My husband and I first met him in Egypt," said Mrs. Crofton hesitatingly. The delicate colour in her cheeks deepened. "One day he began to talk about himself, and he told me about Beechfield, what a beautiful village it was, how devoted he was to you all!"

Janet Tosswill glanced at the clock. "It's already five minutes past eight!" she exclaimed. "I must go and hurry my young people—their father likes them to be absolutely punctual. The gong will go in a minute."

After his mother had left the room, Timmy crept up close to the sofa, and so suddenly appeared, standing with his hands behind his back, before the visitor. She felt just a little startled; she had not known the strange-looking boy was still there. Then she told herself quickly that this surely must be Godfrey Radmore's godson—the child to whom he had sent one of her late husband's puppies.

There came over pretty Mrs. Crofton a slight feeling of apprehension and discomfiture—she could not have told why.

"When did you last see my godfather?" he asked abruptly, in an unchildish voice, and with a quaintly grown-up manner.

"Your godfather?" she repeated hesitatingly, and yet she knew quite well who he meant.

"I mean Major Radmore," he explained.

She wondered why the disagreeable little fellow had asked such an indiscreet question.

Then, reluctantly, she made up her mind she had better answer it truly: "I saw him the day before yesterday." She forced herself to go on lightly. "I sup-

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pose you're the young gentleman to whom he sent a puppy last year?"

He nodded, and then asked another disconcerting question: "Did you leave your dog outside? Dolly thought you didn't like dogs, so my terrier, Flick, has been shut up in the stable. I suppose you only like your own dog—I'm rather like that, too."

"I haven't got a dog," she answered nervously. "It's quite true that I don't like dogs—or, rather, I should like them if they liked me, but they don't."

"Then the dog that was with you belonged to the old gentleman?"

"Old gentleman?" repeated Mrs. Crofton vaguely. This time she didn't in the least know what the child was talking about, and she was relieved when the door opened, and the Tosswill family came streaming through it, accompanied by their stepmother.

Laughing introductions took place. Mrs. Crofton singled out instinctively her gentle, cultivated-looking host. She told herself with a queer sense of relief, that he was the sort of man who generally shows a distantly chivalrous regard for women. Next to her host, his eldest son, Jack Tosswill, came in for secret, close scrutiny, but Enid Crofton always found it easy and more than easy, to "make friends" with a young man.

She realised that she was up against a more difficult problem in the ladies of the family. She felt a little frightened of Mrs. Tosswill, of whom Godfrey Radmore had spoken with such affection and gratitude. Janet looked what Mrs. Crofton called "clever," and somehow she never got on with clever women. Betty and Dolly she dismissed as of no account. Rosamund was the one the attractive stranger liked best. There is no greater mistake than to think that a pretty woman does not like

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to meet another pretty woman. On the contrary, "like flies to like" in this, as in almost everything else.

But how did they regard her? She would have been surprised indeed had she been able to see into their hearts.

Mr. Tosswill, who was much more wideawake than he looked, thought her a poor exchange for the amusing, lively, middle-aged woman who had last lived at The Trellis House, and who had often entertained there a pleasant, cultivated guest or two from London. Jack, though sufficiently human to be attracted by the stranger's grace and charm, was inclined to reserve his judgment. The three girls found her very engaging, and their stepmother, if more critical, was quite ready to like her. As is often the case with people who only care for those near and dear to them, the world of men and women outside Janet Tosswill's own circle interested her scarcely at all. She would make up her mind as to what any given individual was like, and then dismiss him or her once for all from her busy, over-burdened mind.

One thing, however, both Janet and the three girls did notice—that was the way their new acquaintance was dressed. Her black frock was not only becoming, but had that indefinable look which implies thought, care, and cost—especially cost. All four ladies decided immediately that Mrs. Crofton must be much better off than she had implied in the letter she had written to Mr. Tosswill some weeks ago.

Timmy, alone of them all, on that first evening, felt strongly about their visitor. Already he was jealous of the pretty, pathetic-looking young widow. It irritated him to think that she was a friend of his godfather.

After they had all gone into the dining-room, and had sorted themselves out, the guest being seated on her

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host's right, with Jack on the other side of her, Janet announced: "This is supper, not dinner, Mrs. Crofton. I hope you don't mind lobster? When I first came to Old Place, almost the first thing I learnt was that it was celebrated for its lobster pie! Since the War we have not been able to afford lobsters, but a kind friend sent us six from Littlehampton yesterday, so I at once thought of our dear old lobster pie!"

Mrs. Crofton declared that, far from minding, she adored lobsters! And then after she had been served, Timmy's fears were set at rest, for his mother, very improperly the rest of the family thought, served him next, and to a generous helping.

As the meal went on, the mistress of Old Place realised that she had made one mistake about Mrs. Crofton; their visitor was far more intelligent, though in a mean, rather narrow way, than she had at first supposed. Also, Mrs. Crofton was certainly very attractive. As the talk turned to London doings, his stepmother was amused to notice that Jack was becoming interested in their guest, and eagerly discussed with her a play they had both seen.

And the visitor herself? During supper she began to feel most pleasantly at home, and when she walked into the long, high-ceilinged sitting-room, which had such a cosy, homelike look she told herself that it was no wonder Godfrey Radmore liked the delightful old house, and these kindly, old-fashioned, and—and unsuspicious people.

Two tall Argand lamps cast a soft radiance over the shabby furniture and faded carpet. It was a lovely evening, a true St. Martin's summer night, and the middle one of the three long French windows was widely open on to the fragrant, scented garden.

Mrs. Crofton, a graceful, appealing figure in her soft,

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black chiffon gown, hesitated a moment—she wondered where they wanted her to sit? And then Mrs. Tosswill came forward and, taking her hand, led her to the big sofa, while one of the girls fetched an extra cushion so that she might sit back comfortably. The talk drifted to the War, and Enid Crofton was soon engaged in giving an animated account of some of her own experiences—how she had managed to spend a very exciting fortnight not far from the Front, in a hospital run by a great lady with whom she had a slight acquaintance. Soon, sooner than usual, Mr. Tosswill and his three sons came into the drawing-room, and they were all talking and laughing together happily when a most unlucky, and untoward, accident happened! Timmy's dog, Flick, having somehow escaped from the stable, suddenly ran in from the dark garden, straight through the window opposite the sofa round which the whole of the party was now gathered together. When about a yard from Mrs. Crofton, he stopped dead, and emitted a series of short, wild howls, while his hair bristled and stood on end, and his eyes flamed blood red.

They were all so surprised—so extremely taken aback by Flick's behaviour—that no one moved. Then Mrs. Crofton gave a kind of gasp, and covering her face with her hands, cowered back in the corner of the sofa.

Timmy jumped up from the stool where he had been sitting, and as he did so, his mother called out affrightedly: "Don't go near Flick, Timmy—he looks mad!"

But Timmy was no coward, and Flick was one of the few living things he loved in the world. He threw himself on the floor beside his dog. "Flick," he said warningly, "what's the matter, old chap? Has anything hurt you?" As he spoke he put out his skinny little arms, and Flick, though still shivering and growling, began to calm down.

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The little boy waited a moment, Flick panting convulsively in his arms, then he gathered the dog to him, and, getting up from the floor, walked quickly through the open window into the garden.

For a moment no one stirred—and then Mr. Tosswill, who had been sitting rather apart from the rest of the party, got up and shut the window.

"What a curious thing," he said musingly. "I have always regarded Flick as one of the best tempered of dogs. This is the first time he has ever behaved like this."

Mrs. Crofton dragged herself up from her comfortable seat. Her face looked white and pinched. In spite of her real effort to control herself, there were tears in her eyes and her lips were trembling. "If you are on the telephone," she said appealingly, "I should be so grateful if you should send for a fly. I don't feel well enough to walk home." She tried to smile. "My nerves have been upset for some time past."

Janet felt vexed and concerned. "Jack will drive you home in our old pony cart," she said soothingly. "Will you go and bring it round, Tom?"

Tom slipped off, and there arose a babel of voices, everyone saying how sorry they were, Dolly especially, explaining eagerly how she herself had personally superintended the shutting up of the dog. As for Betty, she went off into the hall and quietly fetched Mrs. Crofton's charming evening cloak and becoming little hood. As she did so she told herself again that Mrs. Crofton must be much better off than they had thought her to be from her letter. Every woman, even the least sophisticated, knows what really beautiful and becoming clothes cost nowadays, and Mrs. Crofton's clothes were eminently beautiful and becoming.

As Betty went back into the drawing-room, she heard

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the visitor say:— "I was born with a kind of horror of dogs, and I'm afraid that in some uncanny way they always know it! It's such bad luck, for most nice people and all the people I myself have cared for in my life, have been dog lovers."

And at that Dolly, who had a most unfortunate habit of blurting out just those things which, even if people are thinking of, they mostly leave unsaid, exclaimed:— "Your husband bred terriers, didn't he? Flick came from him."

Mrs. Crofton made no answer to this, and Janet, who was looking at her, saw her face alter. A curious expression of—was it pain?—it looked more like fear, —came over it. It was clear that Dolly's thoughtless words had hurt her.

Suddenly there came the sound of a tap on the pane of one of the windows, and Mrs. Crofton, whose nerves were evidently very much out of order, gave a suppressed cry.

"It's only Timmy," said Timmy's mother reassuringly, and then she went and opened the window. "I hope you've shut Flick up," she said in a low voice.

"Of course I have, Mum. He's quite quiet now."

As the boy came forward, into the room, he looked straight up into Mrs. Crofton's face, and as she met the enquiring, alien look, she told herself, for the second time that evening, what a pity it was that these nice people should have such an unpleasant child.

Tom came in to say that the pony cart was at the door, and that Jack was waiting there for Mrs. Crofton.

They all went out in the hall to see her off. It was a bright, beautiful, moonlight night, and Rosamund thought the scene quite romantic.

Mr. Tosswill handed his guest into the pony cart with his usual, rather aloof, courtesy; and after all the good-

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byes had been said, and as Jack drove down the long, solitary avenue, Enid Crofton told herself that in spite of that horrible incident with the dog—it was so strange that Flick should come, as it were, to haunt her out of her old life, the life she was so anxious to forget—she had had a very promising and successful evening. The only jarring note had been that horrid little boy Timmy —Timmy and his hateful dog.

And then suddenly Enid Crofton asked herself whether Godfrey Radmore was likely to go on being as fond of Timmy Tosswill as he seemed to be now. She had been surprised at the reminiscent affection with which he had spoken of his little godson. But there is a great difference between an attractive baby-child of three and a forward, spoilt, undersized boy of twelve. About a week ago, while they were enjoying a delicious little dinner in the Berkeley Hotel grill-room, he had said:— "Although of course none of them know it, for the present at any rate, Master Timmy is my heir; if I were to die to-night Timmy Tosswill would become a very well-to-do young gentleman!"

Even at the time they had been uttered, the careless words had annoyed Enid Crofton; and now the recollection of them made her feel quite angry. All her life long money had played a great part in this very pretty woman's inmost thoughts.

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CHAPTER VI

BETTY TOSSWILL sat up in bed and told herself that it was Friday morning. Then she remembered what it was that was going to happen to-day.

It was something that she had thought, deep in her heart, would never happen. Godfrey Radmore was coming back—coming back into her life, and into all their lives. Though everything seemed just the same as when he had left Old Place, everything was different, both in a spiritual and material sense. The War had made a deep wound, nay, far more than one wound, in the spiritual body politic of Old Place. And it was of a very material thing that Betty Tosswill thought first, and most painfully, this morning. This was the fact that from having been in easy circumstances they were now very poor.

When Godfrey Radmore had gone out of their lives there had been a great, perhaps even then a false, air of prosperity over them all. John Tosswill was a man who had always made bad investments; but in that far-off time, "before the War," living was so cheap, wages were so low, the children were all still so young, that he and Janet had managed very well.

Only Betty know the scrimping and the saving Jack, at Oxford, and Tom, at Winchester, now entailed on the part of those who lived at Old Place. Why, she herself counted every penny with anxious care, and the stupid, kindly folk who asked, just a trifle censoriously, why she wasn't "doing something," now that "every career is open to a girl, especially to one who did so well in the War,"

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would perhaps have felt a little ashamed had they discovered that she was housemaid, parlourmaid, often cook, to a large and not always easily pleased family. They never had a visitor to stay now—they simply couldn't afford it—and she hated the thought of Godfrey, himself now so unnaturally prosperous, coming back to such an altered state of things.

Besides, that was not all. Betty covered her face with her hands, and slow, bitter, reluctant tears began to ooze through her fingers. She had tried not to think of Godfrey and of his coming, these last two or three days. She had put the knowledge of what was going to happen from her, with a kind of hard, defiant determination. But now she was sorry—sorry, that she had not taken her stepmother's advice, and gone away for a long week-end. Betty Tosswill felt like a man who, having suffered intolerably from a wound which has at last healed, learns with sick apprehension that his wound is to be torn open.

Although not even Janet, her one real close friend and confidant, was aware of it, Godfrey had not been the only man in Betty's life. There had been two men, out in France, who had loved her, and lost no time in telling her so. One had been killed; the other still wrote to her at intervals, begging her earnestly, pathetically, to marry him, and sometimes she half thought she would.

But always Godfrey Radmore stood before the door of her heart, imperiously, almost contemptuously, "shooing off" any would-be intruder. And yet to-day she told herself, believing what she said, that she no longer loved him. She remembered now, as if they had been uttered yesterday, the cruel words he had flung at her during their last hour together when he had taunted her with not giving up everything and going off with him—and that though she had known that there was, even then, a part of his acute, clever brain telling him insistently that she would

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