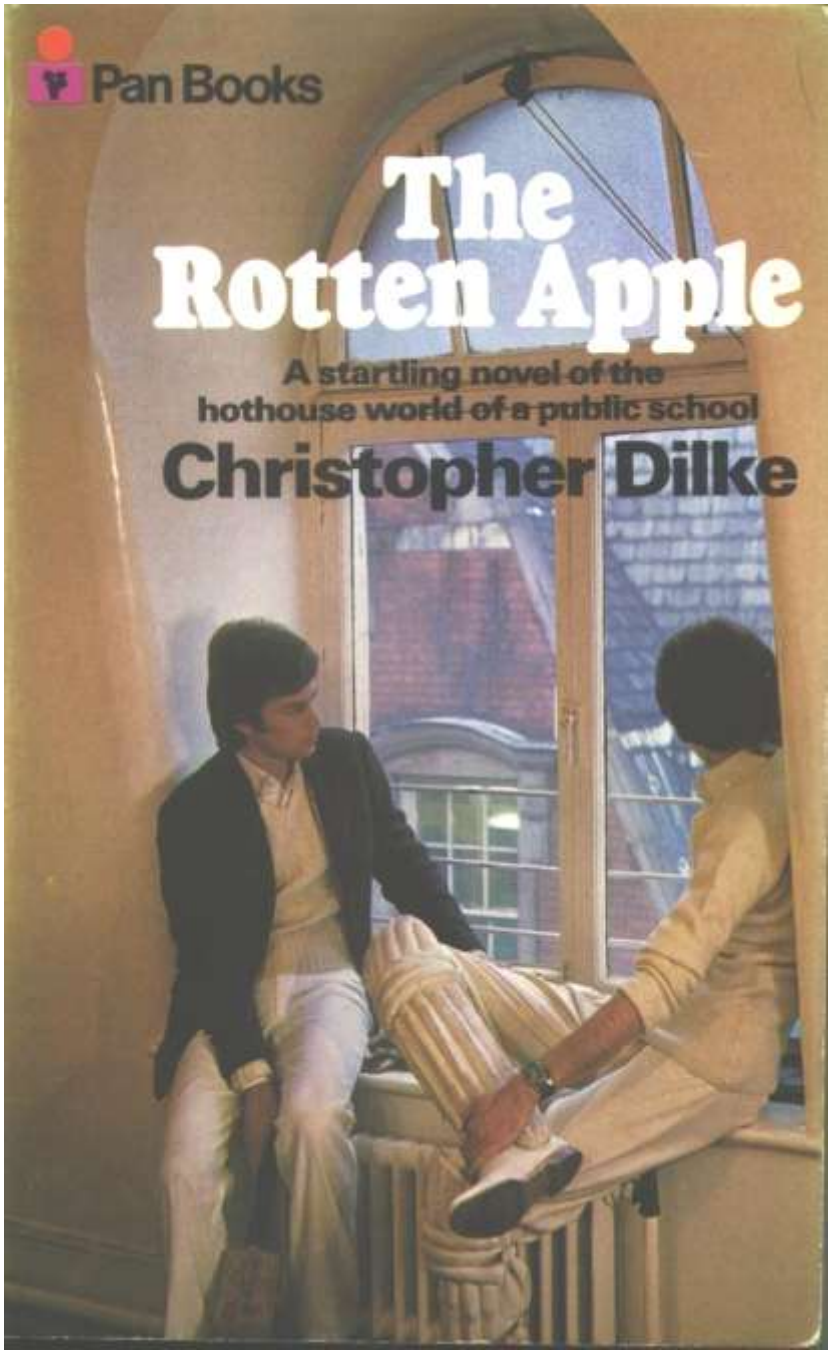
Pan Books
The Rotten Apple
A startling novel of the hothouse world of a public school
Christopher Dilke

CHRISTOPHER DILKE

THE ROTTEN APPLE

UNABRIDGED

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To the Fourth Generation
of Writers in my Family

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A situation such as I describe may have occurred in a Public School. It is a matter of experience that Governing Bodies have sometimes shown themselves to be weak and divided. But Godsell School was founded neither in the Victorian nor in any other Age. The characters of its Staff, even if they are guided by those of actual schoolmasters, are figments of the imagination.

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THE ORIGINAL SIN

"CAN anybody explain to me why there should be three beds in Upper Four?"

Commander Bowen's question, however important or unimportant, made little impact on the Matron of Webb's House. She was preoccupied by something which she had seen as with the Commander she entered the small dormitory. A boy whom she disliked, Anthony Picton, had been sneaking upstairs to a floor on which there were only a bathroom and another dormitory, known as Fifteen.

"There used to be four beds," the Commander said. "There was one over there, where I used to sleep. It doesn't seem to exist any more."

"The numbers in the House have gone down," Matron explained. "We've had to take out some of the beds. There are only thirty-seven in the House now."

"In my time there were forty-two."

"We have to get used to change."

The Commander avoided the disagreeable topic.

"I'll have a word with the Housemaster, Matron."

"Yes. I'll just take you down. I'm sure he'll be free by now."

"Thank you."

Commander Bowen's stiff, ungainly gait showed arrogance and at the same time a pathetic loss of confidence in a world in which the number of beds in dormitories was allowed to decrease.

"I suppose people can't afford the fees?" he said. "You say the numbers have fallen?"

"Yes, and the boys aren't what they were," Matron answered. "Some of the parents are decidedly odd."

"Really? Not that I'm surprised by anything nowadays."

The two of them, the stout man in the double-breasted blue jacket and grey flannel trousers, and the woman with her hair cut short and her mannish style of dress, were united by a sense of the decline of life.

"Things are going from bad to worse, I always say."

They passed through the green baize door which led from the bare, carbolic-scented stairs and landings of the boys' side into the comparative comfort of the Housemaster's residence.

"What's his name? I've forgotten again," the Commander asked.

"Mr. Webb. Rodney Webb."

"Yes, of course. He was a junior in College when I was a school monitor."

Matron knocked at the Housemaster's study door. At the words "Come in" she turned the brass knob and pressed the door open against its spring.

"Commander Bowen to see you, Mr. Webb."

From the desk a thin, intelligent face could be seen peering towards them. Then Rodney Webb stood up and extended his hand. On this signal, which discharged her from her function as a guide, Matron left the door to close itself and darted away towards the green baize partition and the boys' staircase. A little breathlessly she mounted to the top landing. The bathroom was deserted, the tin slipper-baths were empty and a single tap was hissing as steam escaped from it. Joan Harrington, the Matron, went over and screwed the tap tightly shut. In the new silence she marched over to the door of Fifteen and swung it open. Down the centre of the room ran a line of wash-basins. On either side, in neat rows, were the beds covered with red blankets. Everything appeared to be in order, as it had every reason to be on a half-holiday afternoon, but Joan Harrington was not easily deceived. She walked down the alley-way between beds and wash-basins and twitched aside the curtain which concealed the monitor's bed at the end. There were two boys lying on the bed motionless, as if frozen in their embrace by the noise of the Matron's approaching heel-taps. Anthony Picton, the one whom she specially disliked, turned his head and looked at her with apprehension. The other boy was a plump, well-favoured junior called Philip Mallaby.

"You'd better tidy yourselves up and come down to the Housemaster," Matron said. "I'm sure you both know what this means for you."

Anthony Picton acted with a nervous jauntiness, as if pretending that nothing was wrong.

"Actually, I'm not sure I want to see Mr. Webb," he said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "I'll go for a walk, I think. Coming, Philip?"

Philip Mallaby, his clothes hopelessly disordered, had dissolved into shame like a girl and could only shake his head and keep his eyes turned away. The Matron's Scotch terrier, shut in her room, could be heard yapping discontentedly on the floor below.

"You'll come with me here and now," said Joan Harrington, "and answer to the Housemaster."

"Oh, all right, then."

The two boys followed her stiff, indignant figure down the stairs and through the partition. Rodney Webb, the Housemaster, was just seeing off his visitor. He had given details of the help available to needy Old Godsellites for the education of their sons, but it seemed unlikely that the young Bowen would ever follow his father into Upper Four.

"Hullo. What's up?" he asked.

"I found these two together in Fifteen."

"Is that so serious?"

"It is when you know what they were doing."

"Perhaps you'd better come into the study and tell me. Tony and you, Philip, can wait outside."

Rodney Webb fidgeted as the Matron told her tale. He did not try to check the flow of prurient detail, but at the end said quietly:

"I'll see them."

He sat on the desk with one leg swinging, a young-looking, neatly dressed man with the manner of a clever elder brother.

"You were discovered having sex relations together in the upper dormitory," he said. "Is that right? Do you agree with Mrs. Harrington's account?"

Philip Mallaby began to weep, so that his face lost its attraction and became bloated and shapeless. Tony Picton, on the other hand, seemed perfectly collected and was watching the Housemaster with attention.

"If we plead guilty, do we get off more lightly?" he asked.

"Philip," said Rodney Webb, "I'd like you to go to your dormitory and wait there. I want a few words with Tony."

He waited while the younger boy blundered wordlessly out of the room. Then he went on:

"Not very clever of you, Tony. Dormitories aren't particularly private places. I suppose you were in Ralph Norman's cubicle, were you? Not very nice for him. And what would have happened if he'd come up to fetch something? Perhaps he's playing football. Is that it?"

Picton inclined his head.

"Tell me one thing. Is this a usual occupation or a rare exception? How often has it happened before? Or let me put it like this, to spare your feelings. When did the affair begin?"

"At C.C.F. Camp," Tony Picton confessed after a few moments of indecision. "We were alone together in a tent on the last night. It just happened somehow. At the beginning of this term we started off by avoiding each other, but it happened again on a Sunday. After that it seemed to get out of control."

"And you took risks. I see. Tell me one thing, Tony. Are you in love with Philip? Isn't he, well, rather a little tart?"

"If you don't mind my saying so, sir, I think there's a bit of class bias in that remark."

Philip Mallaby was a boy with a broken home, placed at Godsell School by a Local Education Authority in the Midlands.

"That's unfair," Rodney Webb said sharply. "I'm not referring to his class. I'm referring to his morals."

"But you make more allowances for me, don't you?"

"Possibly I do. You realize, of course, what this is likely to mean for your future?"

"I realize that you have to report me to the Headmaster. And the ones who get caught get expelled, don't they?"

"As a rule. Yes."

"Isn't there some picturesque ceremony, sir?"

"Damn you, Tony. Take this seriously. You're passing through a phase. You've got a kind of a temporary illness. Are you willing to take a cure?"

"If I get the chance."

"I'll see you get the chance, but I intend to make my conditions. Philip must be safeguarded. You're to have nothing further to do with him. If you're found even speaking to him, you're out for good. Is that understood?"

"I suppose so, yes. But what's this cure you mentioned, sir?"

"Never mind that. Come and see me after prayers. Now you can go, Tony, and think yourself damned lucky."

He slipped off the desk and opened a double door which led directly into the boys' Hall. A game of ping-pong was being played on the central table and the clacking noise of the ball on the bats seemed deafening, where it had been unheard before.

"Thank you, sir."

Rodney Webb smiled and shut the door. He jingled a key-ring in his pocket, trying to make up his mind, and at last mounted the stairs to the drawing-room on the first floor. His wife Maud was reading a French novel on the window-seat. For a time Rodney walked up and down. Maud was accustomed to this tactic and pretended not to be disturbed, continuing to read tranquilly.

"There's a boy," Rodney said after a time, "waiting in his dormitory and expecting to be sacked for a homosexual offence. I wonder if you'd go and be nice to him. You'd do it much better than I would."

At his first words Maud had disengaged herself from the novel and applied her full attention to what he was saying.

"Is he really going to be expelled?" she asked.

She came and stood beside Rodney and looked down with him from the window on to the boys trickling back from football to the changing-rooms as the afternoon darkened. Their boots rang and scuffed on the metalled road as they crossed over to the House.

"You know," Rodney said, "how much I loathe the victimization of the ones who are found out. There's a dreary mediæval cruelty about it."

"You don't have to convince me, darling, but what about the Headmaster? Doesn't he have to be told?"

"What he isn't told he doesn't know."

Maud reflected.

"Isn't it rather dangerous leaving the two boys together in the House? Who are they, anyway?"

Rodney told her the names.

"Now I'm beginning to understand," she said.

"What d'you mean, darling?"

"Well, you care about Tony Picton, don't you? I suppose it's the other one you want me to go and look after."

"As a matter of fact it is. He's up in Fifteen."

Maud crossed the room.

"I'll go and comfort him. I'm not sure I don't prefer him as a matter of fact. There's something eminently respectable about him, even if he has been up to no good."

When she had gone, Rodney Webb suffered from a familiar sense of uncertainty. Maud possessed the art, without saying anything definite, of puncturing his emergent attitudes. The result was sometimes a Hamlet-like impotence, while on his own he would at least have followed a certain policy. Now he went downstairs, took his hat and made for the long, green enclosure of the playing-fields. Football was over and he had hopes of being alone with his thoughts. No sooner had he passed through the gate, however, than he saw the Headmaster returning from a walk. Cecil Dormer-Wills was short in stature and not at all striking in feature, but compensated for these failings by an unusual force of character. The approaching shape, in the early winter darkness, was imbued with an air of decision.

"Ah, Rodney," the Headmaster called out. "Everything all right?"

It was Rodney Webb's chance to fall into step and discuss his trouble, but to have done so would have been to betray Tony Picton.

"Yes," he said. "Just having a stroll."

As he spoke, he had a feeling of committing himself to a dangerous course of action. It was partly that one knew, with Dormer-Wills, that the exact circumstance of any encounter was noted in case it should turn out to be relevant at a later time. The Headmaster had the shrewdness of a solicitor or a businessman, which he brought to the service of the School.

"Good night, Rodney."

"Good night, Headmaster."

Rodney Webb stopped in his tracks and looked a little desperately after the short figure, which soon disappeared from sight. Above, on the Downs, the outline of a white horse cut into the chalk was still faintly visible. The only other landmarks were the tops of the elm trees moving in the wind and the pallor of the facings of the Victorian buildings along the edge of the field. Suddenly the cold was so intense that Rodney shivered and turned back.

Maud was waiting for him. She explained that Philip Mallaby was in a state close to breakdown, being afraid that his father would be informed of his homosexuality and in his, the father's, own words would half-murder him. Maud and the Matron had put him to bed in a sick-room kept for minor casualties. There he lay, looking guilty but also inviting.

"There's nothing to worry about," said Rodney Webb from the doorway. "I've decided to take no action. Your father won't be informed."

"Thank you, sir."

"You'd better stay here for the night, now that you're here. Matron will give it out that you've got a cold, if anybody's interested."

"Thank you, sir."

"I hear your father has strong views on this sort of thing."

"He caught me once, sir. He knocked the daylights out of me. It was before he went away from home. He said he'd put me to work if it happened again."

"What did your mother think about it?"

"I don't know, sir."

Looking down into the boy's face, Rodney Webb could not help, whatever the pathos of the case, feeling a certain impatience. Apparently the boy was following the course of the mother, in and out of unconventional beds.

"It's an aunt who looks after you most of the time, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Auntie Helen."

Rodney Webb remembered meeting her: a martyred, puritanical figure, whose housekeeping was certainly atrocious.

"Well, take things easy. And, by the way, I've told Tony Picton he's not to have anything more to do with you. The same goes for you in reverse. If I ever hear of your being found together, for any reason, I'll have to come down on you like a ton of bricks. Is that understood?"

The boy nodded agreement, but began to cry again so that Rodney now appeared to himself as a sadistic brute.

"Do you really care?" he asked. "Are you in love with Tony?"

He wanted to know the answer. All his enthusiasm as an amateur psychologist was in his voice, but he had scared the boy out of the power of replying. The tears simply ran down the good-looking face again, reducing it to a blotchy pulp.

Rodney Webb descended to his study in a state of some doubt and confusion. He already recognized that he had been over-hasty in his decision to hush up the case and deal with it himself. He had been motivated almost entirely by affection for Tony Picton and the desire to save him. Now the interview with young Mallaby had revealed dangers and complexities with which he had not reckoned. He still did not doubt that Tony was capable of being reclaimed, but the case of the younger boy was more worrying. That softness and prettiness, that femininity, was bound to appeal to others and be used and enjoyed by them.

He took up the telephone and called the consulting-room in London of his friend Dr. Percy Haddow, a psychiatrist specializing in all sorts of lame ducks such as delinquent vicars, alcoholics and sexual inverts. At the far end of the line he could hear the social drawl of Percy's wife.

"This is Rodney Webb, Godsell School," he announced himself.

"Yes, of course, and you want Percy, but he isn't in. I'm afraid he's got a very difficult case, the kind he has to watch night and day. It's not much fun for me, incidentally, but I won't go into that. Can I give Percy a message?"

Rodney felt discouraged. His friend Haddow was probably looking after a would-be suicide. How important in comparison was the school career of two consenting homosexuals?

"Never mind," he began, but went on: "Sorry. Please ask if he'll telephone me when he has a moment. I've run into a bit of trouble in my House, boy trouble, tell him, and I want his advice. If possible I'd like him to come down here and have a look for himself."

"Aren't I clever?" came the lethargic voice from London. "I've found a pencil and I'm writing it all down."

"Thank you, Deirdre."

"It's a pleasure. The great man shall know all and I'm sure he'll do what he can to help."

As Rodney was putting the receiver back on its cradle Ralph Norman, the senior monitor and son of a politician, knocked and came through the double door from the boys' Hall.

"I hear Mallaby's got leave off prep and prayers, sir," he said, the inflexion of his voice betraying his aroused curiosity.

"Yes, that's perfectly correct."

"Is anything up, sir, if you don't mind my asking? It's just that Matron didn't exactly say anything, but she gave the impression that she could if she wanted to and that it was something to do with me."

"It has only the most indirect connexion with you, I assure you."

"Oh well."

It was inadvisable to have a separate policy from the senior monitor, Rodney knew, even if discussion of this particular matter was dangerous.

"Come in and shut the door," he said. "Sit down. I suppose I'd better tell you about it."

Ralph Norman was agile and athletic, but not graceful. He gave an impression of being narrower than the average boy. When he sat in the low arm-chair his legs had a look of tubular scaffolding.

"Matron caught two boys in bed together this afternoon. One of them was Philip Mallaby. He was upset that his father would get to hear of it and beat him up or take him away from Godsell. You know his father's left his mother who isn't exactly a person of high character from what one gathers."

"Nor is young Mallaby a person of high character," Norman replied with the primness which his Housemaster rather feared. "He more or less made a proposition to Peter Dawson at the beginning of term: a suggestion anyway. Peter was pretty sick about it and asked me to give Mallaby a thrashing."

"But you didn't," put in Rodney Webb, "or you'd have had to tell me about it. I have to authorize all beatings."

"I can't tell you everything," said Norman. "Some things need to be stamped on pretty quickly. But who was the other boy, sir?"

"Actually it was Tony Picton. I'm seeing him after prayers."

"Tony Picton," Norman repeated, nearly without expression.

"Did you thrash Mallaby?" Rodney Webb wanted to know.

"As a matter of fact I didn't. I just told him he was a filthy little scug."

The truth, Rodney had often realized, was virtually impossible to find out in such cases. Confidence demanded that the word of the senior monitor should be respected, yet in this case Norman had almost admitted the unofficial beating before he, the Housemaster, made an issue of it and put the question directly. Only then had Norman gone into reverse. One way of testing the truth would be to ask Mallaby himself if he had been beaten, but very likely the wretched boy would deny it out of a sense of loyalty to the whole inequitable system which had judged and punished him.

"I very much doubt, you know, Ralph, whether the usual deterrents are applicable to cases of this kind."

"They may not be later, sir. But if you catch boys early I'm sure you can change them."

"Let's hope so, Ralph."

"Could I ask one other question, sir?"

"Yes, why not?"

"What do you think Matron meant when she said this case had something to do with me?"

Now Rodney found himself lying and knowing, furthermore, that Ralph Norman knew that he was lying.

"How should I know?" he asked with a weak gesture of the two hands. "Why ask me? I haven't the faintest idea."

"It so happens," said Norman, speaking under what was clearly some stress of emotion, "that I believe I know what it has to do with me, and if I'm right God help Tony Picton."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I believe the little swine were performing in my cubicle in Fifteen, when Matron discovered them. And I wonder how you or anyone else would like to sleep in a bed, knowing that something filthy had been happening on it."

"What are you going to do, Ralph?" asked the Housemaster with a trace of panic.

"I hope I have your permission, sir, to have an explanation with Tony Picton."

"Leave him to me for the time being, Ralph."

The Housemaster was nearly reduced to pleading, in order to have a free hand for the cure or rehabilitation to which he was committed. Yet he had no precise plans. His financial means were small and he had no prospect of being able to afford the fees of his friend Dr. Haddow.

"Do you think I'm doing the right thing?" he asked Maud as she was getting his dinner.

She hesitated and then confirmed: "Yes, darling."

2

AN EXPERT OPINION

"YOU and I are going to fight this thing together," Rodney Webb told Picton in his study, later in the evening. "I'm putting myself at your disposal. Whenever you need help, come to me and I'll do what I can for you. Isn't that a useful suggestion? You see, it's far too dangerous for you to carry on with Philip, so there's likely to be a moment when you begin to take an interest in some one else. If you feel that happening, come and tell me—"

"And you'll forbid me to carry on with the new boy, too, I suppose."

"That's one possibility. Another is that some one could be moved, to put you out of temptation."

"Isn't it against my own interests, sir, to tip you off?"

"Perhaps it's against your immediate interests, but in the long term it's far better for you that this thing should be tackled. You're a valuable person, Tony, who could have a first-class career. That's why I want to help you."

"I'm flattered by your interest, sir. I really mean that. But perhaps it would be more worthwhile to devote your attention to Philip."

"I have the feeling that you're on the scales, Tony. At this moment you could be tilted one way or the other. Philip isn't like that. He's a knowing little scoundrel."

A day or two later Rodney Webb had the opportunity to put this same point of view to Dr. Haddow, who sat in exactly the same chair in the study listening to him. The doctor wore a black suit, quite smartly cut, but with an effect of making him resemble a priest hearing confession. Percy Haddow's face was infinitely gaunt and sorrowful, yet in some curious manner lit from within. His seriousness, intense as it was, was not dull or unattractive. It carried the message of an unlimited readiness to serve others with his skill and intelligence. It was easy for the thought to come into the mind of anyone who met him: "That's a person whom I would go to, if I was ever in bad trouble."

For the moment Percy Haddow's part was to listen with care, only confirming points which were unclear. He had arranged to spend a week-end in Webb's House, so as to have an opportunity to assess the two boys.

"Would you like to see them one at a time?" Rodney asked at the end of their conversation.

"Yes, this evening. In the mean time I'm going for a walk."

He went alone, as the Housemaster had a number of duties to perform. Godsell was unfamiliar to him, except as one of the places to which ex-Colonels retired in the evening of their days. The School, he had already noticed, lay on the edge of the town closest to the Downs, which rose steeply to a long crest on which there were woods in the style of Paul Nash. Immediately beneath these woods was the famous figure of the white horse, standing on its hind legs with its forelegs pawing the air. The posture was hallucinatingly real and the horse's mane, particularly, was executed with an economy which made living artists envious of their prehistoric colleague who was responsible for the cutting in the chalk. But the element of the design which had once attracted the most attention was the animal's erect sexual organ, magnified to a sufficient extent to give it symbolic force. It was vaguely known to Percy Haddow that Canon Barstow, the founder of Godsell at the beginning of the Victorian Age, had insisted on filling in with turf what he regarded as the obscene part of the work of art. Local enthusiasts had occasionally made raids in order to restore the original form and always the School had hastened to reimpose the censorship. In more recent times argument in the Press had replaced guerrilla action. Artists and archæologists represented the view that the original form of the design should be restored. Canon Barstow, however, was able to slumber tranquilly in his grave. For the last forty years the white horse had been continuously deprived of any display of passion. To Haddow, the whole story was full of psychological interest.

As the railway ran in a cutting along the foot of the Downs, it was necessary to discover a bridge before making the ascent. Haddow entered the playing-fields and turned to the right, seeing the main buildings of the School directly in front of him. These

were in a Victorian imitation of Gothic and achieved dignity without any distinction. Climbing plants, which in the course of more than a century had covered much of the rose madder-coloured brick, added an effect of venerability.

An arch led through the centre of the complex of buildings. On either side were notice-boards with a profusion of cards and papers tacked on to them with drawing-pins. Percy Haddow paused for a moment and registered the wording of the announcement of a lecture: "St. Paul and the Modern Age" by the Headmaster. Beyond the arch was a quadrangle of grass with a paved path across the centre. It seemed reasonable to follow this path, but at the moment when he set foot upon it he heard a voice calling:

"Excuse me, sir."

He turned and saw a diminutive but important-looking figure, which had just come out of a doorway at the side of the arch.

"Are you a member of the Godsell staff, or alternatively one of the principal officers of the School?" the same voice asked. "No," said the doctor. "Am I doing something wrong?"

"Not anything wrong perhaps. You're just exercising a privilege which we usually reserve for the two categories which I mentioned. Might I have your name?"

"Certainly. Percy Haddow."

"Mine is Dormer-Wills."

The Headmaster's name identified him to Dr. Haddow, whereas Haddow's evidently conveyed nothing. Nevertheless, there was no mistaking Dormer-Wills's interest in what had caused his presence in the School.

"I'm just a visitor," he explained.

"Then you can't be expected to know all our little foibles, can you? Perhaps I can offer my services as a guide."

"I thought of walking up and having a look at your famous white horse."

"If you just want a look, you'd do better to remain down below."

"I'm sorry. I expressed myself badly. What I really want is the chance of a walk."

"In that case," said Dormer-Wills, "you should turn left when you get to the road. Where the road turns off, there's a passage under the railway line and a zig-zag path leads up to the white horse."

"Thank you."

Percy Haddow thought of asking whether the horse played any part in the life of the School, but dismissed the idea as an impertinence. He bowed slightly and looked for some alternative to the paved path at his feet.

"This is one of the rare occasions," the Headmaster said, smiling, "when it is correct to walk on the grass."

"Oh, indeed. I see."

Walking on, the doctor considered the extraordinary manner in which quite modern schools collected senseless traditions of the sort which in old foundations had been inherited from the Middle Ages. No doubt there was a feeling of inferiority, leading to the obligation to invent the traditions which were lacking. As he turned the corner out of sight, he noticed that the Headmaster was still standing watching him.

The passage under the railway was very sordid, having been used as a latrine. It was a relief to emerge from it on to the chalk path. Percy Haddow wished, though, that he had brought some more suitable shoes. His black town ones were soon in a mess as he slipped and staggered up the slope.

It was a surprise to him to discover that the white horse was fenced in. Could it, he wondered, even in its emasculated condition, be considered as a dangerous influence which it was proper to contain and insulate? Looking about him and seeing cattle grazing on one side, on second thoughts Percy Haddow found it conceivable that the chalk lines required to be protected from damage by the animals. He ducked under the wire and climbed to the central part of the design, where some traces commemorated the original artistic fancy. To be poised above the town and share the surge of the white horse's potency was an experience which would have appealed to him, had Canon Barstow not decided otherwise. Also, in his opinion, it would have made a valuable feature of the boys' education, but perhaps it was unreasonable to

expect agreement on such a point. He had no wish to try conclusions with a Public School and its belief that the value of a community went hand in hand with sexual continence.

For this same reason, Percy Haddow felt uneasy about the function assigned to him by his friend Rodney. Did he really have the right to obtrude his modern attitudes in a traditional situation? Reluctantly, he reached the view that Rodney would have done better to bring the Headmaster into the picture and try to convince him. Certainly the boys' parents should be consulted if psychiatry, even on the most superficial level, were to be employed. Haddow decided that he ought not to go beyond a single interview with each of the two boys and that he ought to act as the Housemaster's friend rather than as a doctor.

It was in this guise that an hour later he introduced himself to Philip Mallaby in the study. He sat back in one arm-chair while the boy squatted apprehensively on the edge of another.

"Tell me," he said, "how you feel about what you were caught doing. Do you feel at all guilty about it?"

"I do now."

"And what did you feel at the time?"

"I suppose I liked it."

"I see. You did it because you liked it and then, afterwards, you felt guilty about it because you knew it was wrong. Is that a fair way to describe what you felt?"

"Yes, sir."

"Never mind about calling me sir. I'm not some one in authority. I'm just trying to help you if I can."

"Yes, sir."

"When you're a good deal older and have a good job in some profession or business, do you think of yourself as getting married and having children of your own?"

"Sometimes I do."

"So you recognize, Philip, that having a wife and family is the normal way of going about things, do you?"

"I suppose I do."

"And do you recognize that behaving as you've been behaving is the opposite of that? Do you recognize that it's something you need to grow out of, if you want to lead a happy life?"

'I hope I will, sir."

"That's a good sign, Philip. There are some people, as I'm sure you know, who never do grow out of their early habits. But you're not going to be one of them, are you?"

Mallaby gulped, but did not answer. He looked close to tears and therefore Percy Haddow veered away temporarily from the main issue.

"Tell me who looks after you at home, Philip."

"My auntie."

"And is she kind to you? Does she take good care of you?"

"She tells me what's right. On Sundays in the holidays we go to church. She makes me pray for my mother."

"And do you sometimes see your mother?"

Looking woebegone, Mallaby shook his head. Again Dr. Haddow veered away.

"Tell me, Philip, would you say you were a clean boy? Do you often wash your hands, just to have them clean?"

"Yes, I do. I like washing."

"And tell me another thing. Never mind if it seems off the point. How do you keep your desk, Philip? Is it always neat and tidy, or just the opposite?"

"Neat and tidy."

"Yes, that's what I'd expect. How much pocket-money do you get from home, Philip?"

"Ten shillings a week."

Percy Haddow's hands were joined in front of him in the shape of a steeply pitched roof. Behind them his face appeared keen and almost fierce, yet understanding.

"How do you spend it, Philip?"

"I save it up, most of it," the boy said with pride.

"That's good, Philip. Now the only other thing I have in my mind is to give you some advice. You don't want to get into trouble, do you? But sometimes you listen to another boy and you

feel weak in yourself. Isn't that right? Well, next time I want you to go to Mr. Webb and tell him about it."

"I wouldn't mind telling *you*," said Mallaby.

"Mr. Webb's just as sympathetic as I am, Philip. That's why he's not punished you and why he's asked me to have a talk with you."

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to go to Mr. Webb and tell him about anything that happens. That's all, Philip."

Mallaby stood up, crouching slightly, and retreated towards the door. Suddenly he said in an awkward rush of words:

"I'm sorry for what I did, sir."

When the door had shut behind the plump, good-looking boy Percy Haddow sighed and took out a note-book. He wrote down Philip Mallaby's name and underneath it some abbreviated notes on the case, which would have been unintelligible to anyone else. Then he put the book away, went to the door and had the other boy, Tony Picton, summoned.

"Where do you live, Tony?" he asked presently.

"Near Maidenhead. It's on the river, actually."

"That sounds rather fun. How many of you are there when everybody's at home?"

"Usually its only Mother and myself."

"You're an only child, then. What about your father?"

"Nothing about him, specially," said Tony Picton in a sulky voice.

"You mean you're not very close to your father?"

"He's not very close to me, half the time. He's a sort of glorified commercial traveller, you know. He's always off to New York or Rio or somewhere."

"And what about when he comes back?"

"I rather ignore him as a rule. He left Mother once, for a girl half his age, but he came back when the money began to run out."

"Isn't he successful in his business?"

"Not specially. Mother's got loads more money than he has. The house belongs to her and she's furnished it all herself. She's awfully good at that sort of thing. She makes quite a speciality of

doing places up and then selling them and starting again somewhere else."

"Does your mother know about your going with other boys?" Dr. Haddow asked.

"Why should she? I dare say she guesses, actually. There's not much that passes her by."

"And what would her attitude be, if she did know about you for certain?"

"I don't know. She might be glad. No competition and all that."

"Do you feel that she's the only woman you could be close to?"

"Oh, I suppose I've got my share of the old Œdipus complex, if that's what you're getting at."

"Tell me how you feel about other boys, Tony."

"I should have thought the answer to that was obvious."

"Have you ever felt excited by a girl?"

"Not a girl, exactly."

"Tell me about it. I'd like to hear."

"All right. I don't mind. There's an actress who lives quite near us. You'd probably know her name, although she's not famous or anything. I think she's an old flame of Daddy's. She was always saying that I should go round and call on her."

"When was this, Tony?"

"At the beginning of the summer holidays. Anyway, one day I was passing her house and decided to accept the invitation. I went up to the front door and rang the bell, but there was no answer. There was a gate into the garden at the side of the house and I thought I'd look through it."

"Well?" asked Dr. Haddow when the pause had gone on long enough.

"It was a warm day for a change, you see. This old cow was sun-bathing on the lawn with nothing on at all."

"And were you really excited?"

"In a way I was, or perhaps I was just curious. She was fatter than I'd imagined from seeing her in her clothes. After a time she noticed me. I suppose I must have made a noise with my feet on the gravel. She swivelled her eyes round and as soon as she

registered my presence she pulled in her stomach, so as to make it look flatter. She didn't make any effort to cover herself up."

"Did you find that surprising?"

"Just funny, really. As an actress, she was probably inventing some scene of initiation for my benefit. She put on a hoarse voice as if she was dying of desire, and suggested I should come close to her. I was leaning over this garden gate, you see, about four or five steps from where she was lying."

"How did you react when she asked you to come close?"

"It was a sort of nightmare, I couldn't move either one way or the other. I was fascinated by just watching her."

"Like an exhibit in a museum," Dr. Haddow suggested.

"Yes, like an exhibit, but I couldn't have gone close, let alone touched her, to save my life."

"What happened then?"

"She seemed to realize my reluctance and said something like 'What's the matter, little boy?' At any rate, something in the tone of voice seemed to set me free. I turned away and as I did so I saw her struggling to her knees and seizing a towel which was lying on the grass beside her. I had an awful feeling that she was coming after me. I can tell you, I just vanished from the gate into thin air. I ran on my toes, without making a sound, until I was round the corner and felt safe again."

"And did you go home? Was your mother there?"

Tony Picton gave the doctor a long, hard look, and for a moment seemed to lose interest in his experience.

"I suppose so. I think she was, at least."

"She must have looked very reassuring to you after what you'd been through," Percy Haddow guessed. "I expect she's always very nicely dressed, isn't she?"

"Well, of course, you couldn't possibly compare her with that cow in the garden."

"So it's your mother on one side and women in general on the other?"

"I suppose so. Yes."

"You feel safe with your mother. That's the point, isn't it? I expect you have memories of when you were a child, going to bed

and your mother coming up and saying good-night. Can you remember that?"

Tony looked ashamed and stayed silent.

"I expect she saw that the curtains were drawn and the blankets tucked in, didn't she?"

Tony said, unconsciously changing the tense to the present: "Somehow she makes everything peaceful, with the bedside lamp shining on the white sheet where it's turned down. Oh, I can't possibly explain."

"You've explained very well, Tony. Thank you."

"Do you mean that's all you're going to ask me? Aren't you going to give me a normal lecture?"

"I don't think it would do any good, if I did. No, that's all."

When the boy had gone Haddow again made an entry in his note-book. After writing a few lines in his spiky handwriting he stopped and sat thinking for several minutes. Then he went on more slowly, aware that the diagnosis was of considerable importance to his friend Rodney Webb.

"Have a sherry," Maud invited when he at last went up to the drawing-room.

Indulged as he was by London life on an ample income, he could not avoid looking at the label on the bottle and confirming that it was South African. Maud held it in a capable hand, ready to pour it into the glass.

"I wonder if I might have something stronger."

"Of course," said Rodney in the background. "I'm sure you need it after all this."

He took out his bunch of keys and went purposefully out of the room.

"I'm sorry to be a nuisance," Percy Haddow said.

"But you're not, Percy. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. How did you find the bad boys?"

Maud affected a certain liberalism, but the strong set of her features raised doubts about the genuineness of the attitude. In many ways, Percy Haddow considered, she was more of a typical exponent of the Godsell philosophy than her husband. Her handsomeness was of a sort which left little room for weaknesses,

whether amiable or unamiable. Like many schoolmasters' wives, she was officer material.

"Oh, I don't know," Percy Haddow said. "These cases are very much of a muchness."

He did not feel capable of saying more until he had a glass of whisky inside him. The process of interviewing patients took virtue out of him. He disliked having to pose as a pillar of moral order, when all the time he was aching to tell them: "I'm as much of a misfit as you are. That's how I can succeed in understanding you, don't you see?" When it was all over, he needed a rapid form of relaxation such as alcohol provided.

"Here we are."

Rodney entered with a bottle of whisky which had a look of having been won in a raffle. He poured out a large tot for Haddow, while Maud brought water.

"How did it go, Percy?"

"Rather exhausting. I needed this."

"Tony's much more interesting than the other boy, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's more interesting. He has a strikingly sophisticated personality. I think he's capable of becoming a mature character. I should imagine he's very good at his work."

"He is. He's one of the best chaps on the Modern side altogether, or so my friend George Medlicott thinks. But that's perfectly splendid, Percy. You mean, you really think he can be got clear of all this business?"

Percy Haddow drank some more whisky.

"I must make myself clear," he said. "I've reached an opinion about these two boys during my conversations with them. I may quite well be wrong, but I don't think so."

Rodney, uneasily clasping one hand in the other, asked:

"Well?"

"The younger boy, Philip Mallaby, isn't a difficult case. He's still in an infantile phase which I won't give a name to in Maud's presence. It shows itself in his preoccupation with personal hygiene and tidiness and his carefulness with money. In the ordinary course of events he's likely to grow out of it. A useful

asset to him is his sense of guilt, which ought to prevent him becoming too habituated in the mean time."

"And what about Tony?" asked Rodney Webb.

He noticed that the other's glass was empty and brought the whisky bottle over. As he poured he asked again:

"What about Tony?"

Maud was watching intently from the window-seat. She saw her husband's hands pouring and the doctor, sitting deep in his chair, signalling that he had enough in his glass.

"Give him some water, Rodney," she called.

Percy Haddow waited until his glass had been recharged. Then he said:

"Tony, my poor friend, is a quite different kettle of fish, but that doesn't mean that he won't make a success of his life."

3

MORAL LEADERSHIP

THE Headmaster of Godsell, Cecil Dormer-Wills, was famous for his facility with paper. This was all the more appreciated by the Governing Body because his predecessor had been an eccentric who kept incomplete records, answered letters only when he felt like doing so and usually mislaid the notes for his sermons. In modern times, a Headmaster required to be a skilled administrator because of the ever-increasing complexity of the examination system and the difficult problems of finance which he shared with the Bursar. He had little time for teaching in a class or cultivating absurd mannerisms, as the late Adrian Massingbird had done. Dormer-Wills's field of action was the study, where he was attended by a skilled group of assistants. Of these the most loyal and ever-present was his secretary Edith Foster. While the small man behind the desk, with neat white fingers, picked up one letter after another Miss Foster sat with head bowed and knees close together on the hard chair which she preferred to any soft one, her pencil scurrying over a pad with an elastic fastening. She was no ordinary stenographer. She could understand every nuance of her master's voice as he told her for example:

"Crabtree. Nasty fellow but needs to be humoured. Send the Humber to the station. Dear old Sir William. Get the Bursar to check the figures and I'll telephone. Nuffield Foundation. Very polite. They've got all the data in their own files, but we could presumably dig them out again."

"I have a copy of the original submission," Miss Foster murmured.

"Clever girl."

She squirmed with pleasure and shifted her leathery, dutiful body on its hard perch before wielding the pencil again as the Headmaster continued:

"Rodney Webb's appointments to monitor. Pooley, McBain and Picton. What do we know about Picton?"

"He's in VI Mod A."

"No, to his discredit, I mean. I'm sure there's been something."

"Smoking," said Miss Foster. "He was caught on the first Sunday of term on White Horse Down. You gave him a warning and made him attend all Chapels for two further Sundays."

"Who caught him?"

"Mrs. Harrington did. Mr. Webb didn't want any action taken, but you insisted."

The Headmaster mused for a few moments, while Edith Foster kept her eyes lowered but somehow still signalled her readiness to provide information.

"Query Picton's appointment," Dormer-Wills finally said. "I'd like to talk to Rodney Webb about it. Any time will do."

"Yes, Headmaster."

It was the boast of Cecil Dormer-Wills that, being a bachelor, he had no need to waste his time on "wives and children." He was always available for consultation with his Staff. Therefore Rodney Webb did not require to make any formal appointment. He simply appeared in the Headmaster's study at the earliest moment which was practicable.

"You wanted to see me."

Rodney could only occasionally bring himself to say "Headmaster" in the formal style; nor was he capable of the friendly "Cecil." He compromised by using no form of address at all, thus giving an unintentional impression of rudeness.

"Yes, Rodney. Sit down please."

Rodney looked for a chair but could not find one within easy reach, so he remained standing.

"It's about your nomination of Picton to be a monitor next term."

"Oh yes?"

"You remember he was caught smoking at the beginning of term."

"Surely the odd cigarette is a rather venial offence?" Rodney said.

"Not in my opinion. However, what I wanted to ask was whether you really have confidence in this boy."

"He's an interesting boy and definitely above the average in intelligence. I think a position of responsibility would do him all the good in the world."

"You haven't quite met my point, Rodney."

"I'm sorry."

The Headmaster arranged the articles on his desk, the blotter, paper-knife and box of clips, with what seemed to Rodney Webb a maddening tidiness.

"Is Picton a leader?" he asked. "Is he a good moral influence on others? Isn't that what it boils down to? Isn't that the issue?"

At the reference to moral influence, although he had half expected it, Rodney began to feel extremely uneasy. He now wished that he had accepted a seat. The mere fact of being on his feet tended to push him into an attitude of aggressiveness.

"As a Housemaster," he began, "I have to take a good many factors into account, some of which are probably only recognized by myself—"

Dormer-Wills began to shake his head and wag a finger in a way which he had and which Rodney resented, but it was difficult to continue the sentence in face of these signs of disapproval. The Headmaster asked quietly:

"Can't we stick to the main issue, Rodney?"

"What *is* the main issue?"

"I've already defined it for your benefit. Is Picton capable of moral leadership?"

"With respect, Headmaster, I think you're in danger of begging the question. My object in appointing Picton as a monitor is to put him in a position where he has to exert moral leadership, as you call it."

"But you see, Rodney, we can't afford to take risks when we have young boys under our charge. It's not just a matter of smoking."

Rodney Webb's uneasiness continued to grow as the Headmaster's cat-and-mouse game went on.

"I have a proposition to make to you, Rodney. Picton's in George Medlicott's form for French, so George knows him well. Will you accept George's casting vote on this question?"

"George is my best friend," said Rodney defensively.

"Exactly. That's why I make the suggestion."

Rodney knew that his friend George Medlicott, a retired Housemaster still active on the Staff, was at that particular moment in the Common Room only forty or fifty yards away. It was tempting to call him in and rely on his support. He could clearly visualize George's pale blue, matinee idol's eye flickering in his direction, while the brain behind it weighed objectivity against loyalty. The trouble was, he was not absolutely certain that the support would be forthcoming. It was even possible, knowing the subtle and devious methods of Dormer-Wills, that George had already been consulted and had innocently expressed doubt about Picton's character.

"George is my best friend," he repeated, "but I can see absolutely no reason why he should be made the judge in a cause concerning a boy in my house, whom I presumably know even better than he does."

Dormer-Wills began to fiddle with his paper-knife again, laying it exactly parallel to the edge of his blotter.

"How am I to know," he asked, "that you're really doing the right thing?"

This meant, Rodney at once recognized, that the Headmaster was about to give way but was likely to attach some ungenerous condition to his yielding.

"How am I to know? Obviously I can't know, can I, Rodney? But I can and will hold you personally responsible for this appointment."

"Surely I'm always responsible. I don't shirk responsibility in the slightest. I'm just as responsible for McBain and Pooley."

"Over McBain and Pooley I agree with you. I accept your recommendation. Over Picton you've thought fit to assert your own judgement as opposed to mine and that of a senior member of the Staff. That's the difference, Rodney, and I can only say to you: 'Let's see how it turns out'."

"Very well, then. I suggest that we leave it at that."

"Indeed we'll leave it at that, for the time being. Thank you for coming to see me, Rodney."

The Headmaster stood up, but was so short in stature that the change in position made little difference to his height. If his body was virtually that of a child, the face seemed very old indeed, grey in complexion and lit by chilly, experienced eyes. As a mark of courtesy he walked with Rodney as far as the door, which he opened, but no friendly warmth emanated from him. He simply stood aside and nodded, as if to say: "We shall see."

Rodney Webb returned to the Masters' Common Room, where his friend Medlicott was sitting sideways across an arm-chair in an attitude of Roman abandon. Rodney sat down in the next chair and asked:

"Has our Cecil consulted you about a certain Tony Picton and whether he should be made a monitor?"

"Tony Picton's in your House. He's no concern of mine, except that I teach him a lot of drivel."

"Exactly, but I'd still like an answer to my question."

"The answer is no. I can't remember ever discussing Picton with the Headmaster."

"So he lied to me," said Rodney in a sudden fury, getting on to his feet again. "I'm going back to throw it in his teeth, George."

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Tell me exactly what was said."

George Medlicott listened to the account and commented: "You see, he didn't directly lie to you. What he said was ambiguous. It usually is, of course. He's very careful about the way he uses words and he always remembers what he's said. In this case he would claim that his judgement and mine could theoretically both be against you. You wouldn't get any change out of him."

"I'm still going back to give him hell," Rodney said with a smile which showed that he was no longer serious.

"What is there against Picton, anyway?" George Medlicott asked. "A bit of a mummy's darling, I suppose."

"I'm afraid it goes farther than that."

"Does it indeed?"

"Yes. Walk along with me and I'll tell you."

Rodney Webb could see that their conversation was attracting attention among the few others in the Common Room and he

knew that even an overheard word or two was capable of causing trouble. It was safer to talk in the open air.

The two masters walked back past the Headmaster's house and along the street, which was empty except for a boy or two entering or emerging from the tuck-shop known as Ma Parsons' after a legendary manageress of the past, notorious for her trick of adulterating sugar. The daylight would have gone in another quarter of an hour. Already at least one window was suffused by yellow light from within. The School, in spite of its hideous architecture, attained a peaceful and dignified appearance at this hour of the evening when the trees seemed to increase in size.

Rodney Webb made his case over Tony Picton with confidence, being aware of his friend's sympathy on the particular issue. They had joined the Staff at much the same time, had gone off to the War together and both achieved senior rank, and had long overlapped with each other as Housemasters. They had often discussed the question of homosexuality in the School. Both were of the opinion that some thirty or thirty-five per cent of the boys were touched by actual experience during their time in the School. Such experience, in Rodney Webb's phrase, was "more or less normal." Yet officially the School continued to regard the odd case which came to light as the gravest sin, which required to be purged ruthlessly. Cecil Dormer-Wills, a Doctor of Divinity with the ambition of becoming a Bishop, showed little more charity than any of his predecessors. "There have been dark stains on our white garment," he had lately written to the Governing Body, "but with God's help the harm has been eliminated and there are signs of returning health." The substance of fact concealed in this metaphorical sentence was that a boy named Joshua Smithers had been trapped into an admission of guilt, had attempted suicide and had been expelled. The Headmaster's attitude to the whole incident had not found favour with the two friends.

George Medlicott was more silent, less ready to commit himself, than Rodney had expected. He walked as far as the garden door of Webb's House and refused an invitation to tea.

"What does Maud think?" he asked.

"She stands by me, George, absolutely."

"That's good. I'm afraid you're going to have trouble over this one, Rodney. And Cecil can be very awkward if he thinks he's being deceived."

"What are you implying?"

"It might be wise to write a note to Cecil, saying that you've had second thoughts and are withdrawing your recommendation of Tony Picton. You haven't said anything to the boy yet, have you?"

"Not yet but, good Lord, George, I can't go back on everything at this stage. Surely you're on my side?"

George Medlicott stood in his characteristic fashion leaning at an angle against the air, his handsome face almost devoid of expression; or perhaps the expression was turned inwards by the concentration of his mind.

"Yes, Rodney, I'm on your side. I'm just trying to warn you that Cecil can be terribly, terribly awkward. That's all."

When George Medlicott had gone swinging off along the brick wall and the row of elms, Rodney Webb felt a crushing sensation of loneliness. He went indoors and looked for Maud, hoping to put his problem before her, but she had evidently gone out, for the drawing-room was in darkness. He descended again to his study and sent for Tony Picton. As he waited, he realized that he was afraid of showing weakness. In spite of the unfavourable omens he was set upon going ahead and committing himself for good. Yet the instinct for self-preservation was not altogether dormant. Even when Tony came and stood in front of him he still played with the idea of sending him away with a little small-talk or an excuse.

"Tony," he said, "I've appointed you as a monitor next term. You probably know that there are three vacancies, which is more than there usually are."

"If I may ask, sir, is this appointment already final?"

"It's been confirmed, Tony. I saw the Headmaster half an hour ago. Otherwise I wouldn't be telling you."

"I think you're making a mistake," Tony Picton said, looking to one side towards a chair.

"Yes, do sit down," the Housemaster invited with a gesture. "I'm interested. Tell me why you think I'm making a mistake."

"Well, because in a manner of speaking you're delivering yourself over bound and gagged into my hands. You've no doubt convinced yourself that I'm a redeemed character, but how do you know that I'm redeemed?"

"I suppose I have confidence in you."

"It will be bad for you, won't it, if the confidence turns out to be misplaced?"

"Quite bad. Yes."

"In that case I'd really rather not be a monitor, sir. I don't get on with Master Norman and I can't see myself fitting into his little world."

"You sound as if you'd had trouble with Ralph Norman," Rodney Webb said uneasily.

"I certainly have, but the less said about it the better or I shall get the reputation of a sneak as well as a pervert."

"Don't get bitter, Tony. Don't you see that I'm giving you the opportunity of becoming some one important and looked-up-to by boys in the House? In my opinion responsibility is exactly what's needed in your case. That's why I've recommended you. In any case I can't go back on it now. My mind's definitely made up. There are only eleven more days of term and then you'll have the Christmas holidays to prepare yourself."

"You mean by fasting and prayer, as Mr. Carpindale always enjoins upon us in Chapel?"

"Mr. Carpindale could probably help you a lot if you could bring yourself to take his advice. A shallow scepticism isn't the ultimate answer, you know."

This was old ground between them, for at one time Tony Picton had attempted to get leave off attending Chapel on the plea that he was an agnostic. Rodney had warned him against taking the matter to the Headmaster, who was bound to react in a scandalized fashion as head of the School's religious establishment.

"So," Tony said, "I don't have any option. I'm being drafted as a monitor and I have to turn over a new leaf in case I let you down. Probably I sound very ungrateful, but I want to get it straight before I start."

"You've got it straight all right," Rodney Webb agreed.

"You know, it may not sound like it, Rodney, but I do appreciate what you're trying to do for me."

Tony Picton had got to his feet as he spoke and now stood by the double door leading into the hall. His use of the master's Christian name was a calculated gesture. He had moved away quickly in order to dodge any protest or questioning. In another second he would be gone and Rodney Webb wanted to say something amiable, but could not find the words. He compromised by simply looking pleased.

4

THE ESCAPADE

NORMAN and McBain were sitting in the senior monitor's study. Norman's perquisites of office consisted of a broken swivel chair, a desk deeply scored with the initials of predecessors and a bookcase devoted to an equal proportion of textbooks and paperbacks. Works of art were also present in the form of some nudes cut out of magazines, on to which the heads of apes had been pasted. A generation ago, such a display would have called forth the ultimate sanctions of discipline, but nowadays the processes of change were active within the School, even if they emanated mainly from the boys and not from the masters, who were still committed to an ineffective resistance.

"How about coming to the Rendezvous Café tonight?" asked McBain.

His accent had a tinge of the Scottish, which was partly assumed in order to charm the listener. He was a strong, affable, confident person without any particular distinction as a scholar.

"You'd better watch your step, Gavin," Norman warned him. "You're bound to be put up to monitor unless you do something bloody foolish in the last few days of term. If you take my advice you'll stick to the straight and narrow. There's no point in mucking up your promotion."

"Unfortunately," said McBain, "I'm rather keen on a certain little girl, who I haven't seen for more than a week. And as you know, she has a friend who'd be happy to renew her acquaintance with you."

"You're totally wasting your time, Gavin. I haven't the slightest intention of coming with you. Also, as I'm in charge of discipline in the House, I can't give you any guarantee that you won't be nailed."

"If you won't come," said McBain, ignoring the threat, "I'll have to take Pooley and the girl friend will go to him."

"What happens if you're both found out?" asked Norman. "We've got three monitors leaving this term and Pooley and yourself are the only possible replacements."

"Who'll be the third?" McBain asked.

"By seniority it should be Picton, but I've told the Webber I'm not prepared to accept a bloody little scug like that as a monitor. Not after what happened on my bed in Fifteen."

McBain nodded his agreement, even if he doubted whether Ralph Norman had really used such strong language to the Housemaster. The two senior boys shared an intolerance of homosexuality which was linked with awareness of its proximity. McBain's special role in the House was that of a purveyor of more normal joys, of which he had a precocious knowledge. As opposed to the exaggerated respect for ladies, which the School was always tempted to instil, he propounded the doctrine that females, as he called them, were keener if anything than males on sexual play. This view he expressed on purpose in the most vulgar and condescending terms, so as to appear almost inhumanly sophisticated to the other boys. Thus he now remarked to Ralph Norman:

"The girl friend's a hot little piece. She'll be wetting her little pants at the idea of your coming along."

"What about your girl?" Norman asked, trying to draw his friend out.

"Oh, Doreen knows her stuff. She's a real little pro. She can do all the French tricks."

The improbability of the assertion did not immediately strike Ralph Norman and he was drawn towards the thought of the experience waiting at the all-night café.

"I wouldn't mind coming all the same," he said regretfully. "I just don't dare."

"I'll take Pooley instead," McBain repeated.

Ralph Norman remembered that the two girls were both attractive in different styles. McBain's friend Doreen was dark and slightly over-plump, looking older than the seventeen which she claimed. The other, the one being offered, was neater and smaller with the *chic* which somehow creates itself even in the outskirts of remote country towns. She was socially a cut above Doreen, being

the daughter of an auctioneer. On the occasion when Ralph Norman had gone with McBain, he and the slim girl had remained talking nervously in the café while the others spent a long time outside in the dark car-park. It appeared from McBain's account that they had broken into an Austin saloon, in the back of which they had drunk whisky and tasted other joys. Ralph was not at all proud of the unenterprising figure which he had cut, but he felt that now, with the prestige of being senior monitor, he would be able to compete with his friend McBain. Unfortunately, the position also carried a responsibility which he was unwilling to abdicate.

"Does this girl go the whole way?" he asked.

"You mean does she or doesn't she? Believe me, from all I've heard about her from some excellent sources, she does. Are you going to change your mind, Norm?"

The abbreviation of his name seemed appropriate to the narrow, athletic Norman, whose prominence in the School was due to conformism and avoidance of eccentricity rather than outstanding talent.

"I'm not, Mac," he said firmly, "and now I've got to do some work."

McBain got up without taking offence and left his friend's study. A few moments later he was sitting beside Pooley, who had freckles and red hair. His suggestion was positively received and a division of labour was agreed on. Pooley would put them both down for late work in the library while McBain, immediately after prayers, would go out by the tradesmen's entrance and buy a quarter of a bottle of Scotch as a provision for the night. From the pub he would also telephone to Doreen, who would inform the other girl.

By arrangement the boys met at half past eleven in the changing-room, which had a window giving upon Rodney Webb's garden. By that time the tradesmen's door had been locked by the Housemaster himself. The two of them carried various garments designed to make them look like anything but schoolboys: caps, mufflers and in McBain's case a leather jacket sold to him by a Rocker. It was necessary for them, one at a time, to climb on to

the top of the lockers and roll through the bottom half of the long window, which pivoted in the centre. On the other side was the roof of a greenhouse, which needed to be negotiated with care. Pooley went first, found the wooden edge of the sloping roof and crept down it until the jump on to the grass was low enough to be made with safety. Gavin McBain followed with more of a clatter and less elegance.

"Jesus," he whispered. "I nearly fell through the bloody glass."

Beyond the garden wall the line of elms made a pattern against the sky, giving them their orientation. They kept to the grass borders so as to avoid the noise of gravel underfoot. The garden gate was unlocked. It creaked on its hinges as Pooley opened it. Unadmitted in the minds of the two boys was their sheer delight in the adventure, as opposed to its sexual content. This led them to make a detour past the Headmaster's house, where a crack of light could be seen between the curtains of the principal bedroom. True to form, McBain whispered a scurrilous guess at the way in which Cecil Dormer-Wills was occupying himself at midnight.

Opposite, there was a passage which led between the Chapel and other buildings towards the High Street. Outside Woolworth's, at the traffic lights, the pair were fortunate in begging a lift and scrambling into the front cabin of a waiting lorry. The Rendezvous Café was nearly two miles away, which would have made a disagreeably long walk. McBain did indeed own a second-hand motor-cycle which he kept in the town, but it was usually out of action because of supposedly fantastic improvements being carried out on it by a friendly mechanic named Ted.

The lorry stopped outside the Rendezvous Café and Pooley, in scrambling down, tore a triangular rent in the seat of his trousers. Given his sanguine temperament, this mishap did not specially disturb him and also provided a subject for conversation with the girls who were waiting. Gavin McBain saluted Doreen by gripping the nape of her neck with his hand and standing over her in a proprietorial manner. In this attitude he made the introductions.

At about the same time Rodney Webb was saying to his wife:

"Why should Pooley be working late, d'you think? I've never known Frank Pooley to work overtime. Gavin McBain, too. I

wonder what those two are up to. Do you have any theories, Maud?"

"If I were you, I should go and have a look," Maud suggested practically.

"In the library, you mean? I don't like seeming to snoop."

"Well, then, stop worrying, darling."

His wife's directness drove Rodney into taking action. He crossed into the boys' side of the House and went up to the library, which he found in darkness. A serious sense of foreboding now haunted Rodney, in view of the fact that both the boys were his candidates as monitors. He went into the dormitory known as Lower Four and switched on the electric light for a rapid second, which was still long enough to confirm that Pooley's bed was unslept-in. He then mounted to the top of the house and entered Fifteen, where McBain had the bed next to his friend Ralph Norman. The dormitory was not in total darkness, for a glow shone from behind the curtains of Norman's cubicle. Rodney guided himself by this until he was close enough to observe that McBain's bed was apparently occupied. He stopped by the foot of it and then knocked lightly on the corner-pole of the cubicle.

"Who is it?" came Norman's voice.

When Rodney Webb pulled the curtain aside, the senior monitor was revealed virtuously in bed and looking up from the study of a serious book. Rodney was momentarily reassured and sat down on the only available chair.

"What's the matter, sir?" Norman whispered.

Pooley doesn't seem to be in the House. He's supposed to be working late with Gavin McBain, but I see Gavin's in bed all right."

It was just noticeable to Rodney's trained Housemaster's sense that Ralph Norman was slow in either confirming or denying this assertion.

"At least," he added, "I hope he's in bed. Is he, Ralph?"

"I—I suppose so, sir."

Rodney was thoroughly alarmed again, but took care not to show it. He stood up, returned to McBain's bed and twitched the sheet and blankets back. An unconvincing dummy made of a

bolster, a rolled-up suit and a towel was revealed in the dim but adequate light. With disgust Rodney picked up some of these materials and carried them into the cubicle.

"This is what was in the bed," he whispered accusingly. "You'd better put on your dressing-gown and come down to my study straight away, I think."

There were murmurs from different quarters as they left the dormitory and one boy, as if in a trance, sat up rigidly in bed and made a groaning sound. Rodney hurried through, but looked for Picton and received an impression of the boy's bland, sleeping face.

In the study he came to the point immediately.

"You obviously knew about Gavin McBain not being in the House," he said. "Perhaps you even put the dummy in his bed. If so, it was rather overdoing things. A boy can't both be working late and asleep in bed at the same time."

Ralph Norman, looking miserable, murmured that he had not prepared the dummy.

"But it couldn't have been prepared without your knowing, could it? So, now you're going to tell me exactly where McBain and Pooley are."

Norman remained silent.

"Surely you realize that there's nothing to be gained by keeping me in the dark. The pair of them have been nailed in any case. Where are they, Ralph?"

"If I tell you, what can you do?"

"I can use my judgement in their best interests. The alternative is for you to make yourself an accomplice of theirs by defying your Housemaster."

In Norman's narrow, serious face Rodney Webb could read the conflict between almost equally strong loyalties.

"All right," the boy said at last. "I expect they're at the Rendezvous Café, about two miles out on the A30."

"What have they gone there for?"

"The fun of it, I suppose, sir."

"You'd better come with me in the car. Pull on some clothes as quickly as you can and come down to the garage."

"Yes, sir."

At the last moment Rodney thought of Maud, who had started him on his course of discovery and therefore had some right to be kept informed. However, a trace of cowardice prevented him from going to her. He was afraid of being either criticized or comforted until the worst was known.

Rodney Webb had a smart, newish car and was a good driver. In a very few minutes, at a warning word from Norman, he drew up outside the Rendezvous, a shabby-looking building of the "good pull-up for carmen" type. There were two or three lorries parked around it. Inside, at the plastic-topped tables with their bottles of sauce, the drivers were sitting talking and drinking something out of thick cups while a grim-looking patroness presided. Of the boys there was no sign.

"Let's look in the vehicles," Rodney suggested.

The café was more or less surrounded by its car-park. The lorries were in line in front, except for one which was backed in at the side. While Rodney was shining a torch into the interior of this the driver came up behind him and inquired:

"Anything the matter, mate?"

The missing boys were actually in the house belonging to the parents of Sylvia, the slim girl, less than fifty yards away from the café. Frank Pooley had felt alarmed at the prospect of taking off his trousers, even for such an innocent reason as getting them mended. Sylvia had supplied him with a tartan rug, in which he had wrapped himself. He sat on the sofa in the living-room, watching as she plied her needle under the lamp. The soft light fell on her hair and gave it a radiance which appealed to his sense of beauty. He was a little disappointed that the scene had developed so naturally and ordinarily, in contrast to the orgiastic delights promised by Gavin McBain. Gavin had gone to another room with his own girl, Doreen, having agreed that he would behave. But presumably Gavin, if there was any substance behind his boasting, was using the time to good advantage.

"There you are," said Sylvia. "See if that's all right. It's not as neat as it might be, I'm afraid."

She came over and smoothed out the seat of the trousers for him to see.

"That's marvellous," Frank Pooley said although he hardly looked, so conscious was he of the girl's nearness.

"Well, then," she said sensibly, "I'll turn my back while you put them on."

Frank Pooley did as she suggested, but experienced a sort of anguish, which came partly from genuine embarrassment and partly from the idea that he was missing an opportunity and would never succeed in explaining to McBain why or how he had failed in manliness.

"Are you respectable yet?" Sylvia asked.

Shamefacedly, he admitted that he was, whereupon Sylvia turned round and looked him over.

"You're a quiet one, aren't you?" she asked.

"Am I? I'm sorry if I'm too quiet, Sylvia."

"Oh, I'm not complaining. I like the quiet ones. Your friend Gavin's a sight too noisy for my taste."

Frank Pooley's usual confidence began to seep back into him at hearing his friend discounted.

"Why don't you come and sit beside me?" he asked.

"All right. I don't mind if I do."

She sat close to him and turned her body towards him with a clear intention of provocation. But when he slipped his arm round her she leaned away from him.

"Quite the caveman," she said mockingly.

He tried to kiss her, but the kiss landed on her cheek.

"Please, darling!"

Unexpectedly she gave him her mouth. He had expected it to be cool, but the pressure was warm and firm. She slipped down a little on the sofa and closed her eyes. Frank Pooley found himself trembling in a fever of expectation. As he bent down to kiss her again, however, there was a ring and a double knock at the door.

"Who's that?" asked Sylvia.

"I'll go and see."

He went out into the hall and through the glass of the front door could distinguish the silhouette of two figures. Sylvia followed and stood beside him.

"You'd better open up," she said, "or Dad will be down to see what's going on."

At that moment Gavin McBain, in a state of some disorder, emerged from the opposite door. There was a glimpse beyond him of Doreen in distress among the splendours of the front parlour. Gavin followed with his eyes the direction in which Frank was looking.

"It can't be the Webber," he said at sight of the silhouette.

But when between them they opened the door Rodney Webb was discovered standing with the senior monitor on the step.

"I'd like to know," he said in a furious voice, "what you think you're up to."

"I think I can explain, sir," said McBain.

Unfortunately his voice was audibly slurred from the whisky which he had been drinking and he sounded too pleased with himself. In an effort to correct that bad impression Frank Pooley intervened and said:

"I was having my trousers mended, sir."

Rodney Webb looked incredulous. For several seconds he was speechless. Then he said:

"Come with me at once. I've got the car outside."

Frank Pooley realized that Sylvia was still beside him and that the Housemaster was looking at her with disfavour.

"As for you, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," Rodney Webb told her.

"Who? Me? What d'you mean?"

Rodney did not pursue the attack, but walked away towards the garden gate. Ralph Norman, looking apprehensive, stayed on the door-step. He whispered to the malefactors:

"Sorry. There was nothing I could do. The Webber nailed that you were out."

"How did he find the house?" McBain inquired.

"He grilled them at the café. The old girl gave you away."

From upstairs in the house came the sound of colloquy between Sylvia's parents, who were evidently about to intervene. Sylvia herself made a sign to the two boys that they should leave in a hurry. As soon as they were out of the door she shut it decisively.

Rodney, still seething with anger, was waiting for them at the car.

"You realize, of course," he said, "that this is too serious an offence for me to deal with. You'll have to see the Headmaster in the morning."

A thought stirred in Frank Pooley's mind, that there was a paradox inherent in the School's attitude, but for the time being he did not express it. He climbed with Gavin McBain into the back of the car and sat there while the Housemaster, with hands visibly trembling, drove back into Godsell. There was no conversation during the journey. Even at the House few words were spoken. The building, which in daylight looked so hideous, had a certain beauty in the icy winter night. It was like a fortress in which the victims were to be immured.

"I expect we'll see each other in the morning, sir," McBain said with heavy irony.

"Yes, I'll send for you."

"Good night, sir."

Ralph Norman walked with the other two into the boys' side of the House. When the green baize door had swung behind them he said:

"You're in for trouble."

"What will happen to us?" Frank Pooley asked.

"You won't be monitors, for certain."

"Is that all?"

"I shouldn't think so. I should think you'll get a caning."

Frank became thoughtful and dropped the subject, but Gavin McBain boasted:

"Believe you me, even if we get expelled it was worth it."

5

TWO EXECUTIONS

CHAPEL in the morning seemed endless to Rodney Webb. He was in his place early and waited for the Headmaster, as head of the religious establishment, to make his ceremonial entrance in company with the duty chaplain. This was Fatty Carpindale, a good friend of Rodney's who was fond of preaching austerity but appeared as a poor advertisement of it with his ample figure and waddling gait. Fatty was an innovator in the matter of morning service. Suspecting that nobody ever listened to or even noticed the traditional forms, except subconsciously, he had introduced such material as the diary of an imprisoned criminal and the story of a nun raped in the Congo. It was the opinion of the School that this latter account, which was being presented in instalments, did not go far enough. Fatty read the passage for the day in a highly polished and dramatic style. Rodney Webb, however, scarcely heard a word. He was trying to envisage where the Headmaster would be standing at the end of the service and the exact wording of his own announcement about the two boys and their escapade.

In fact it happened differently. When Rodney reached the courtyard outside, the Headmaster's gown-clad figure was already disappearing round a corner. Rodney forgot about dignity and broke into a brisk run. Cecil Dormer-Wills turned when he heard the hurrying footsteps behind, but then he continued walking so that Rodney could fall into step beside him. They went nearly as far as the Headmaster's house, from the ground-floor window of which Edith Foster was looking out expectantly, and then turned back to walk to and fro on the grass while Rodney expounded his case.

"You were quite right to refer the matter to me at once," the Headmaster said. "It's a moral issue."

"Yes, indeed."

"I'll see the two boys together."

"Will you see them now?"

Cecil Dormer-Wills considered for a few steps.

"We'll give them a little time to see the error of their ways, shall we?" he asked, as if drawing the other into collusion.

"Whatever you say."

"I'll see them at half past eleven, after the break."

"Very well. I'm warn them."

"You might tell Meadows, too, if you're going back to the Common Room."

Rodney Webb stopped in his tracks.

"You've decided, then?"

"Why not? The facts surely aren't in dispute?"

"No, of course not. I just thought you'd prefer to hear their own version before deciding on the punishment. But I agree, there's no harm in having Alec Meadows available."

In the Common Room Rodney discovered Captain Meadows warming himself with his back to the stove. The compactly built, good-looking man occupied a position apart from the other masters in having no particular academic attainment. He presided over physical training, cricket and football coaching and the organization of the Combined Cadet Force. To the boys he was Smart Alec.

"What's up?" he asked.

"McBain and Pooley climbed out and went home with some girls."

"Did they indeed?"

Rodney Webb almost expected Meadows to add some such comment as "Good for them!" The Captain's attitude was noticeably hedonistic, even though he played so crucial a part in the disciplinary system of the School.

As a result of the delay in bringing them to justice, the evildoers had the opportunity to co-ordinate their line of defence. The trouble was that Frank Pooley found himself unable to concur wholeheartedly with McBain's hearty, traditional, philistine attitude. It seemed to him ridiculous when the other announced:

"Old Cecil's quite a boy himself."

Nothing was plainer to Frank Pooley than the fact that the Headmaster was no sort of a boy at all. He remembered the

nocturnal scene when they had seen the light in Dormer-Wills's upper window. McBain had jumped to the conclusion that something improper was taking place, whereas his own imagination tended to conjure up a picture of the Headmaster on his knees or deep in the perusal of a scholarly book. McBain affected to consider the world as a farm-yard in which only the morals of the farm-yard were observed; but the attitude was not meant to be taken altogether seriously and it was difficult to construct a policy on such a basis.

"Can't we make out that we were setting an example of normality?" Frank Pooley asked, as a compromise.

"Now that's a good idea. We were actually sacrificing ourselves by having it off."

Frank Pooley shied away again. He was not enough of a fraud to pretend to have gone as far as his friend, and yet did not want openly to admit the paltry truth.

"We were just behaving normally," he repeated, "which oughtn't to be considered as a crime."

It was Gavin McBain, when they came before the Headmaster, who volunteered to give a full explanation of their conduct. They neither of them slept very well, he said, and they had decided to go for a walk. The door had been locked, so they climbed out of a window. A friendly lorry-driver had offered them a lift.

"So you knew where you were going? You admit that, do you?" asked Dormer-Wills.

"We thought we might have a coffee at a place we knew of. Unfortunately, my friend tore his trousers in getting out of the lorry. Then in the café we bumped into a couple of girls and one of them kindly offered to repair the damage, sir, at her house."

The Headmaster put on a smile which even McBain found alarming.

"Do you expect any reasonable person to believe that?" he asked. "How was it that Mr. Webb and the senior monitor knew so exactly where to find you, if it was all such a coincidence."

"We did intend to have a cup of coffee there, sir, as I said."

"And an encounter with the girls, too, didn't you? You can't deny that the girls were expecting you. You knew them beforehand, didn't you?"

"No, sir," Frank Pooley spoke up. "I'd never met them. You could ask the girl, sir, if you wanted."

"What about McBain's girl?" The Headmaster turned back to the Scottish boy. "Had *you* met your girl before last night?"

"I believe I'd run into her once or twice," McBain admitted.

"How can you possibly go with girls of this sort?"

"If you met them, sir, you'd find them very nice girls, I'm sure."

This was McBain applying his farm-yard theory, but it proved a dismal failure with the Headmaster, who answered:

"I'm sure I'd do nothing of the kind and I have no intention of trying. You are senior boys who have been suggested as monitors for next term. Yet you go climbing out of your House to meet a couple of fly-by-nights. What sort of example do you think that's setting?"

This was Frank Pooley's opportunity to develop the case which had come into his mind the night before, if he was ever going to do so.

"Isn't it quite normal and natural, sir," he asked, "for us to take an interest in girls at our age? Surely it would be much worse if we were simply interested in boys."

At first it had been an effort to begin speaking at all, but Frank gradually warmed to his argument and became fluent in spite of the icy silence which blanketed his words.

"As you know, sir, the main topic of conversation in a House is homosexuality. There are references to it in almost everything that's said. Quite a lot of boys go in for actual homosexual experiences, and even when they're discovered nothing's done about it and it's all hushed up. Yet if two of us have a more or less innocent meeting with some girls, we seem to be regarded as criminals. Surely another way of looking at it, sir, is that we're just growing up?"

"Setting an example to the others, sir," Gavin McBain put in with a shade of insolence masked by his earnest expression.

Cecil Dormer-Wills seemed to be astounded by something in Pooley's speech. He had been standing behind his desk, but now he relapsed into his chair and began jotting with a pencil in a note-book.

"'Even when actual homosexual experiences are discovered,'" he read out, "'nothing is done and it's all hushed up.' Is that what you told me?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"I can back up Pooley, sir," put in McBain. "The homosexuals seem to get away with it every time."

"And what exactly do you mean by that?"

"Handled with kid gloves, sir. Tucked up in the sick-room and examined by a psychologist."

"Is this an actual case that you're telling me about?"

The boys exchanged a glance, which conveyed that they had been led away to the point of almost betraying one of their contemporaries. An instant agreement between them was arrived at, by eye alone, to draw a line before the betrayal went any further.

"It's just our impression, sir, that we've got from our experience in the School."

"And there's no actual case? Is that right, Pooley?"

"No particular one, I don't think, sir."

"I see," the Headmaster summed up. "A boy had a homosexual experience, he was put to bed in the sick-room and seen by a psychologist, but there was no particular case. That's very interesting. I can assure you it will all be looked into in due course. But for the moment I'm concerned with your own squalid little adventure, because that's what it is. Are you seriously advocating, Pooley, that the boys of this School should be allowed out at night and encouraged to go home with girls they've picked up in working-men's cafés? If that was the case, I don't think parents would be very pleased. Not all boys, Pooley, go in for smutty talk and smuttier actions. The number who do is very small and steps are taken to ensure that their influence is not allowed to spread. Boys in school are like apples in a basket. If one goes rotten, it infects the others unless it's immediately removed and thrown

away as rubbish. It may be—I don't yet know—that there's been a rotten apple in your House and that contagion has set in. If so, I shall know what to do and I shan't hesitate to do it.

"As for you two, I intend to put a question to you and I shall regard you as being on your honour. Did anything wrong take place with these girls? I'm sure you understand what I mean. Pooley?"

"No, sir, I kissed mine once, sir."

"And how were you dressed when the kiss took place?"

"Oh, fully dressed, sir. I had a rug round me while she mended my trousers, sir, and then she turned her back while I put them on."

Frank Pooley himself felt that this self-exculpation was rather craven and, glancing sideways, confirmed that McBain was unfavourably impressed.

"And after that you kissed," said the Headmaster. "And what happened then?"

"The bell rang, sir."

"I see. Mr. Webb arrived just in time, did he? And what about you, McBain?"

"We had a bit of fun, sir."

"What exactly is that?"

"It's difficult to explain, sir."

Gavin McBain, as Frank knew, was able to play a dead bat in this fashion with considerable skill. He was a boy of the world on the way to becoming a man of the world.

"Was your experience the same as Pooley's?"

"I expect there was a good deal of similarity, sir."

"Can I have your word that nothing really wrong took place?"

"Just a bit of fun, as I said, sir."

"Very well, I shall accept that there was only kissing and petting and I shall fix the punishment accordingly."

A cold dread began to settle upon Frank Pooley's spirit. He had somehow convinced himself that it would be possible to argue a way out of the predicament and that the Headmaster would prove to be understanding. Now escape was barred and nothing was left but execution.

"As I think you both know," Dormer-Wills told them, "I have broken with precedent in that I never use the cane myself. Some one else is good enough to do so on my behalf. In this case I'm satisfied—and it's fortunate for you—that nothing occurred to justify expulsion from the School. But there was a moral lapse of a serious kind and I'd be failing in my duty if I didn't see that it was punished. I shall instruct Captain Meadows to give you each six strokes of the cane."

The Headmaster went to the door, opened it and called: "Alec!"

Something about the use of the Christian name, a sense of acute incongruity, jarred Frank Pooley into panic action. He retreated towards the outer door.

"I refuse," he said in a voice pitched too high. "Nobody can force me if I don't want to."

Alec Meadows entered the room with his quick, supple stride. He took in the situation and called out:

"Give me a hand, McBain."

McBain took care to look in the wrong direction and thus to be late in intercepting Frank Pooley, who backed out of the door into the courtyard and shut it behind him with a slam. Whatever the further chances, it was a relief to escape from a humiliation which had seemed unendurable to him. Frank turned the corner of the building and stood pressed close to the brick wall. The door through which he had come was opened and after a few seconds closed again. He remained pressed against the wall. After a little while he heard the muted sound of the beating inside the room. He counted the six strokes, imagining the soldierly endurance of Gavin McBain which he was unable to emulate. At the sixth his tension had begun to relax when a seventh stroke came and then an eighth, each one singing distantly in the air before it made impact on the bare flesh.

Frank became intensely thoughtful. He hoped that he might be wrong in his reasoning out of why the punishment had been increased. Soon, however, Gavin McBain came round the corner and stopped dead at the sight of him.

"You got me two extra ones," McBain said.

"How d'you mean I got you?"

"Smart Alec called out to me to help in catching you. He and Cecil were in a wax because I didn't co-operate. Christ, I'm going to be sore. Smart Alec has too good an eye for my liking."

"Sorry, Gavin," Frank Pooley said.

He felt admiration for his friend, who could go through the experience of a Headmaster's beating, as conducted by proxy, without it making the faintest mark on anything but his skin.

"Oh, it's all right. But what about you? I'd go back, Frank. Honestly I would. You've got to face it some time."

As they talked they were visible to a number of boys and also masters, who were moving about the courtyard, but nobody gave any sign of recognition. The fact of the punishment had become known through the jungle telegraph which operates in all schools and had the effect of isolating the victims, almost as if they were lepers, while the actual proceedings were in train. Later there would be keen interest in the details, but this would not be shown until they were back in the encapsulated boys' world of changing-room, exercise yard or lavatory.

"How many will I get, do you think?"

"At least eight. Maybe a dozen."

"I don't think I dare, Andy."

"Oh, go on. You haven't got any alternative."

Pale as milk and water and with a desperate backward look of entreaty at his friend, Frank Pooley rounded the corner of the building again. He laid his hand on the door handle, paused and had to exert all his will-power to twist it and enter the room. The Headmaster and Captain Meadows appeared to be sharing the telephone on the desk. At the moment of his entry Dormer-Wills glanced up and then said into the mouthpiece:

"It's all right. Never mind. He's come back. I'll be wanting to see you later, Rodney."

Outside, it was Gavin McBain's turn to lean against the wall and listen for the tell-tale sounds. The brick surface was rough and he pressed back with his loins to find a more comfortable posture.

6

THE ANTAGONISTS

IT was typical of Cecil Dormer-Wills to prefer a cat-and-mouse game to a blunt confrontation. He was in no hurry to keep the appointment which he had made with Rodney Webb. Rodney, in fact, was being subjected to the same treatment as the delinquent boys: being allowed to "see the error of his ways" for an hour or two. The Headmaster had also the further motive that, given time, the names of the homosexual pair were likely to be revealed to him. His secretary Edith Foster had a relationship with the Matron of Webb's, Joan Harrington, which was a useful source of information. It was true that the Matron's loyalty to Rodney implied some discretion, but her addiction to gossip was liable to override other motives.

In fact the Headmaster, with his remarkable skill in putting two and two together, already guessed who the active partner in the affair would turn out to be. His phrase about the rotten apple in the basket had not been employed in the abstract. He had a particular fruit in his mind's eye.

When the telephone on his desk rang, with no Edith present to identify the caller and refer to him, he was reluctant to answer. As he feared, it was Rodney.

"I could come round now, if you want to see me, Headmaster."

"Yes, all right, Rodney."

"You remember you said—"

"Yes, I remember very well."

Dormer-Wills sat in the increasing darkness and concentrated his mind on the problem of Webb's House, as he saw it. Only when Rodney loomed up at the door from the courtyard did he snap on the electric switch. He came round his desk and perched his small body in an arm-chair: the one in which Andy McBain and Frank Pooley had knelt for their caning earlier in the day.

"We need to have a talk about McBain and Pooley, don't we?"

"Perhaps we do," Rodney admitted.

"You've got three monitors leaving and McBain and Pooley were two of your suggestions for replacing them. I'm sure you'll agree that they haven't justified your confidence."

"I don't know, Headmaster. I have a good deal of faith in Pooley. He's a sensible boy with a lot of idealism, whatever the appearances to the contrary. I still think he'll make a good monitor. McBain I'm not so sure of, now."

When Dormer-Wills strongly disagreed with something, his face showed it by a curious shut look, a look of distaste, before his words supplied the confirmation.

"I'm afraid I think just the opposite. McBain's a manly boy. He knew he'd done wrong and he took his punishment. Pooley's a different case altogether. He actually argued with me about this sort of conduct being normal. By the bye, he seemed to think abnormal conduct went unpunished in your House, Rodney."

Rodney Webb's face betrayed no outward sign of confusion or guilt, rather to the surprise of the Headmaster, who continued talking:

"I don't think I'd care to see Pooley's ideas made into an example for the younger boys to follow. And another thing, I expect you realized from my telephone call that he ran away. He couldn't face up to Alec Meadows, as McBain did. That's not the sort of boy we want as a monitor at Godsell."

Rodney said: "He's sensitive. I don't believe he'll do this sort of thing again. Gavin McBain, on the other hand, is a hardened sinner. All the beatings and lectures in the world aren't going to make him give up one particle of the material joys he considers himself entitled to."

"Why did you recommend him as a monitor, then?"

Rodney Webb was in some degree discomfited and did not for the moment answer. While he still remained silent the Headmaster asked:

"How did you know where to find these boys last night? Ralph Norman showed you, didn't he? How did he manage to be so well informed?"

As once or twice in the past, Rodney was stunned at the capacity of the Headmaster for patient analysis which led him unerr-

ingly to a crucial point. On such occasions it was nearly useless to deny or argue, but something had to be said.

"Ralph Norman believes in knowing what's going on. That's his value to me. He's a good boy himself, but he's no simpleton when it comes to measuring other boys' actions."

Cecil Dormer-Wills pondered over this answer, which it was clear that he found unsatisfactory. He did not refute it in detail, however, but said:

"I'll tell you my candid opinion, Rodney. It's an opinion which I gave the benefit of to young Pooley this morning. I told him that a rotten apple corrupted other apples with which it's in contact. I believe that's what's happened in your House, Rodney. The basketful of apples has gone rotten. Here are two of your choices for monitor discovered in loose company at midnight, and it comes out that a School monitor knows all about it. Perhaps he takes his turn with the others and he was only lucky enough not to be caught."

"Really, Headmaster!"

Rodney Webb did his best to convey by his surprise that the other had gone too far and ought to withdraw. He found it alarming, and damaging to his pride and conscience as a Housemaster, that the trusty and loyal Ralph Norman should become involved in the argument.

"I'm not happy about your House, Rodney," the Headmaster said.

"There are bound to be lapses of discipline. They have to be taken seriously, I know, but not too seriously. McBain and Pooley have had their punishment."

"I'm not thinking about McBain and Pooley."

The emphasis in the Headmaster's remark, to anyone who knew him, conveyed a disagreeable chill. Rodney asked:

"Who are you thinking of?"

"I'm not sure that I've been kept adequately informed about developments."

"How do you mean?"

"Let me put it in this way. There was a third person, besides McBain and Pooley, whom you recommended for a monitorship."

"Yes, indeed. Anthony Picton."

"Did you have the right, do you think, to press Picton's claim to promotion against my strong feeling to the contrary?"

"I'm not sure that I understand. I gave you my opinion on an internal matter in my House, which was perfectly proper."

"What I'm suggesting is that you may have been less than frank to me about Picton. You've got the chance to be frank with me now."

From where he was sitting the Headmaster could see that the light had gone on in his secretary's typing office on the side of the courtyard which ran at right angles to his own study. He understood Edith Foster well enough to know that this was her signal that she was at his disposal and could be invoked if necessary. In some respects he was a nervous man. He liked to be safe behind a barricade of record and procedure and not to expose himself to contradiction. He thought of telephoning to Edith, but knew it would be a delicate matter to ask her the question which he had in mind in Rodney's presence. Instead, he tried to will her to telephone him, but the instrument remained silent.

"A Housemaster's bound to know a lot about his boys," said Rodney Webb. "He wouldn't be much use if he didn't. It's up to him to keep a sense of proportion about their failings."

"You're thinking of a particular failing of Picton's, are you?"

"Possibly I am."

"What is this failing, Rodney?"

With his definite question Dormer-Wills tried to bring the other's fencing to an end.

"It's something I thought it right to deal with myself," was the best which Rodney could manage.

"Is it a homosexual failing?"

"It could be described like that."

"Was there an offence, as Pooley thought fit to inform me? If so, it was obligatory to report it to myself."

"I don't think you've ever issued a clear instruction to that effect."

"It's one of the instructions given by Dr. Massingbird, which I endorsed when I took over the Headmastership."

"Some of us," said Rodney, "were altogether out of sympathy with Adrian Massingbird's views on the subject. In his time homosexuality was regarded as an invention of the Devil. Any unfortunate boy who was found out was either flogged or expelled. But since then attitudes have changed. It's come to be realised, at least by a number of us Housemasters, that homosexual leanings are often outside a boy's own control. He needs sympathy and understanding, above everything else. It's worse than useless to punish him. If he's handled decently, he may grow up into a well-balanced member of society."

The Headmaster's face began to appear more and more buttoned-up and hostile during this discourse and Rodney Webb, desperately seeking to convince, continued in what was for him a familiar vein:

"In the case of some boys, homosexuality is a more or less normal part of their sexual development."

"I'm not concerned with all this modern jargon," Dormer-Wills said. "No doubt you've learnt it from your psychologist friend, whom I encountered on the premises a few days ago."

The release of this new instalment of his knowledge about the case was carefully timed for its effect.

"I've learnt from my friend, of course, but I have my own views as well," Rodney said, and then went on: "I had no idea you'd spoken to Dr. Haddow."

"Yes, I spoke to him. I didn't ask his opinion. I have no intention, as long as I'm Headmaster, of believing that homosexuality is a normal part of any boy's development."

"Then it looks as if we must agree to disagree."

"It's not quite as easy as that. I'm the Headmaster and I insist on seeing these boys of yours and coming to my own decision on their case."

"You can't reverse what I've done at this stage, Headmaster. I've committed the School and the School can't let me down without manifest unfairness to Picton and—"

Rodney stopped just in time before uttering Mallaby's name.

"Picton and whom?" the Headmaster asked.

"Before I tell you, I'd like your assurance that you won't reverse the decisions I've made, whether rightly or wrongly."

"What are these decisions?"

"I told Picton and the other boy that their offence would be overlooked on certain conditions. They were to stop associating together, for any purpose whatever."

"And will they pay the faintest attention to this decree of yours, do you imagine?"

"Yes, I do, Headmaster. My method of running my House, which I believe has been fairly successful in the past, has been to repose confidence in my boys."

"Your method's not being very successful at the moment, is it? What other conditions did you impose?"

"I said that if either of them were tempted, and Dr. Haddow said the same, they were to come to me and ask for my help."

"Really, you astonish me," the Headmaster said after a pause for thought. "I wouldn't have thought you were a naïve person."

"Trusting is a better word than naïve."

"Tell me one thing. What about the parents? How do they come into this? Are they going to be in favour of the permissive attitude which you've taken up?"

"I've written to Tony Picton's father," said Rodney. "It seemed a better idea than getting on to the mother, who's probably largely responsible for the condition in the first place. I've no idea what the father's attitude will be. I imagine he's rather a sophisticated type, a bit of cosmopolitan. Tony doesn't think much of him, but that's because of the mother's influence, of course."

Dormer-Wills's face again made an expressive picture of the distaste which he felt for talk of such a kind.

"Have you heard from this cosmopolitan gentleman?" he asked.

"Yes. He's coming to see me to-morrow."

"And what about the other boy?"

"Ah, that's more difficult. He comes from a different sort of background. He's been brought up by an aunt who's something of a holy terror. I can't think it would do any good to approach either her or the father, who's a no-good and violent into the bargain."

"We have to remember we're only trustees," the Headmaster said sententiously. "Children belong to themselves and their parents."

"But some parents are hopeless. I mean, they're utterly atavistic in their responses."

"I suppose you mean that they have a strong sense of right and wrong. In that case, I'm a little bit atavistic myself. The School has to show where it stands over homosexuality. Otherwise parents are never going to confide their children to us. I'm afraid I have to insist on seeing these two boys."

"Do I have the assurance which I asked for?"

"I'm not prepared to tie my own hands in advance."

"Then I'm not prepared to give you the name of the other boy."

Dormer-Wills looked at Rodney Webb with some contempt.

"Do you really think it's going to remain a secret?" he asked.

"Perhaps not, but the School's committed to giving him and Tony Picton another chance. If you, as Headmaster, want to punish them I'll have no alternative except to oppose you. Several of the other Housemasters think as I do and will support me."

The Headmaster's hands were trembling as he listened to this mutinous statement, which clearly could not be allowed.

"Are you threatening me?" he asked.

"Not exactly."

"It sounded to me as if you were. I think you'd better return to your House and I'll communicate with you in due course."

"Very well."

Rodney Webb left the study with what looked like perfect self-control, as compared with the Headmaster's nervousness, but once he was outside in the courtyard he had to lean against the wall as McBain and Pooley had recently done. The accustomed constellation of the School buildings, the Chapel tower, Barstow Hall and the library, seemed to be wheeling against a dark sky and he clutched at the brick to steady himself. Across the courtyard an

electric light snapped off, but nobody emerged on to the rectangle of grass. The secretary was making her way by an internal passage to the Headmaster's study.

"Return to your House" was the phrase which stuck in Rodney's mind. It sounded almost as if he had been placed under arrest. The implication was that he should wait in a state of suspension for the Headmaster to pass sentence on him, whereas his own impulse was to organize a line of defence which would make action by the Headmaster impossible. He decided to call upon George Medlicott. The one thing which he would not do, although he would have liked to seek reassurance from Maud, was to return home. He felt the need to prove himself on his own.

"I needed you, Edith," Dormer-Wills was saying to his secretary, "but somehow I managed without. I guessed that Anthony Picton was one of the two boys."

"I wanted to phone, Headmaster."

"I wish you had. I needed the other name."

"It was Philip Mallaby."

"Yes, I thought so. From what Rodney Webb said it sounded like one of the State bursars."

"I expect you'll want to see Picton and Mallaby, won't you, Headmaster?"

Edith Foster perched on the edge of her chair, pencil and notebook ready to jot down the time of the appointment and any other details. Dormer-Wills, however, remained standing indecisively over her.

"Why does Joan Harrington talk so freely?" he asked.

"It isn't easy to get her to say anything, Headmaster. It's just that we've got to know one another."

"Keep in touch with her," said Dormer-Wills. "I'd like to know at once if there's any recurrence of this affair between the two boys."

"Won't you be seeing them, then, this time?"

Edith Foster was seldom mistaken about her employer. She could tell when he was formulating some subtle policy and was happy to be its instrument as it developed. She never pressed for more information than it was suitable that she should have.

“I don’t think I will,” the Headmaster said. “It’s not always a good thing to act like a bull in a china shop.”

7

A MEDIATOR AT WORK

GEORGE Medlicott poured out some sherry, which was of a better quality than was usual at Godsell and was also provided in much larger quantities. The life of his decanter was never prolonged from one week to another, as in some masters' homes. It was not so much that he had independent means, although it was true that he occasionally contributed lucratively to newspapers, as that he liked to live with a certain amplitude and style, whatever the consequences.

"The starting-point," he announced, sniffing at his glass but actually concentrating on the subject, "is that it's no earthly use crying over spilt milk. For reasons of your own you've defied Cecil's authority and he's thoroughly cross as a result. He made a serious tactical error in speaking to you in the way he did. Housemasters who are behaving politely themselves can't be treated like that. It's against the tradition of the Godsell Headmastership which is one of *primus inter pares*. The Governing Body would certainly take that point, if the case were ever referred to it.

Where you've offended is in failing to follow the doctrines of Adrian Massingbird, who was no man of the world at all and not a spectacular thinker, although he was in many ways a delightful old person. Since his time modern ideas have crept into the Public Schools. Some of us, like you and me, are really quite modern in our attitudes. I was always aware, when I still had a House, of lots of homosexual affairs going on. I chose to try and remedy the matter in comparatively subtle, long-term ways. I was sure I was justified, because so few cases turned out to be ones of definite, permanent inversion. I know you'd agree with me there.

"With the accession of Cecil, there was a marking of time. Of course one doesn't like to say so openly. Cecil brought a most distinguished record of scholarship with him to the School. He could claim a Treble First, as you know, if he didn't consider such pretensions bad form. But the fact of the matter is that he's never properly grown up. His whole life has been passed either with an

adoring mother or safe behind the walls of an Alma Mater. He's never known a woman, it's a fairly safe bet, and he has a neurotic fear of the usual alternative."

"You mean he's abnormal," said Rodney.

"Oh come! It's not nearly as easy as that. His sex instinct has been sublimated into love of his mother and I suppose love of himself. Because he's been successful, in spite of his weakness, he's actually become strong. He's known how to ally himself with other weak people who are on top of the world."

"Like Sir William Nutting," Rodney suggested.

"Like Sir William Nutting, as you say. The one-eyed men inherit the arm-chairs at the Athenæum and they convince themselves that they're clear-sighted Athenians. If they're Bishops, as Cecil will be one of these days, no doubt, it won't ever matter. A Bishop doesn't make any significant impact on modern life. He just talks a sort of patter which every one recognizes is what he's paid to do, although nowadays there are admittedly one or two remarkable exceptions.

"But Headmastering is a different thing. A Headmaster is in charge of one of the nurseries of our world. It's true that he can't afford to be too progressive. Otherwise he'll end up somewhere in the country, teaching a handful of delinquents and having no real influence on the situation. But he can't afford to be behind the times, either. If he is, like Cecil, he'll have the wool pulled over his eyes by you and me and everybody else.

"The one thing which isn't really necessary, my dear Rodney, is to provoke a direct clash."

"I thought you said it was no good crying over spilt milk."

"So I did. The clash has happened and the next step, if you ask me, is to try and discover how acute it is. I propose to get myself consulted by Cecil and try and give him some good advice."

"Supposing it comes to the worst," asked Rodney, "do you think the Staff will support me?"

"Some of them will, but I shouldn't be too optimistic. Public School masters aren't a very radical lot of people. I'll do my best for you, of course."

"Thanks, George."

"More sherry?"

"No, I'm on my way. Maud will be waiting for me."

"What are you going to do when Cecil sends for your two boys? If I were you, I'd let him have his due as Headmaster and trust to his good sense."

Rodney Webb stood up and looked with some regret round the warm, well-furnished drawing-room of his friend. The dwellings reserved for senior masters, who were not Housemasters, were civilized in comparison with the bleak tenements of the Houses.

"Bless you, George. Love to your good lady."

George Medlicott's wife was his second one. She was much younger than he was, engagingly simple in character and devoted to his interests. Rodney, with his more complicated and intellectual marriage, was slightly envious.

He found Maud waiting to tell him something and had to defer recounting his own story. She said, as soon as she had shut the door of the drawing-room behind them:

"I've had a row with Joan Harrington."

"But why on earth, Maud?"

"You know we have a sort of love-hate relationship. We have to do so many things together that we know a lot about each other by now. But personally, I'm sometimes quite nauseated by her kinkiness."

"What did you have the row about?"

"She'd been having tea with Edith Foster and was seeing her off. Quite at random, when Edith had gone, I asked her what they'd been gossiping about. At first she made a mystery about it and then admitted rather guiltily that they'd been talking about you. It was all very well your having such modern ideas, and so on, but right was right and wrong was wrong and the wrong ought to be punished, said Joan."

"What cheek!"

"It's worse than you imagine, Rodney. I suspect she gave away Picton and Mallaby's names, which was probably what Edith was after, because she's a terrible spy. Anyway, I'm afraid I slightly lost my wool and said Joan had no business to criticize you. Thereupon she was rude to me and I was rude back to her and she

threatened that she could make a lot of trouble if she chose to, although she didn't explain how."

"Your afternoon seems to have been nearly as unpleasant as mine was."

"Sorry, Rodney. I was monopolizing the conversation with my pointless women's quarrel."

"It wouldn't be any improvement if I went on about my own quarrel."

"Yes it would. Tell me."

Rodney described the scene with the Headmaster, with Maud looking more and more apprehensive.

"You're in bad trouble, my poor Rodney."

"Why do you say that?"

"Cecil has never liked you, has he?"

"No, but he's not a very friendly soul to anyone."

"I get on with him," said Maud, "after a fashion, because we have the same sort of clerical background. But you and he are chalk and cheese. Also I suspect that he has a certain streak of ruthlessness or impatience, which could be dangerous."

"What should I do, then?"

"You've done quite well in getting George to act as mediator."

But George Medlicott, face to face with the Headmaster, was having a difficult time. Cecil Dormer-Wills was taking the view that Rodney Webb was irresponsible:

"Look at his suggestions for promotion to monitor. Two of the boys have come up before me for a disciplinary offence and the third one should have done, according to the rules."

"It's not Rodney's fault, Cecil. Boys grow up quickly nowadays. One day they're ordinary schoolboys and the next they're young men."

"I always try and discourage any emotional involvements."

"But you can't be certain you've succeeded, can you?"

"Perhaps not, but what I deplore in Rodney Webb is that he jumps on any band-wagon that comes along. No doubt he sees himself as the modern liberal intellectual and myself as a sinister old reactionary. What he doesn't seem to appreciate is that there's an ancient sort of wisdom in a school like this."

"It's not so very ancient, Cecil. It was founded only in 1840."

"Yes, but you and I know that Canon Barstow was obeying a historical purpose in founding the School. He wanted to pour into the mould what was most valuable in the national tradition. Religion was the vital ingredient. Barstow had some of the single-mindedness of St. Paul himself. He was aware that the good life requires a lot of discipline but he didn't shrink from that. He set an example which, by and large, boys have responded to ever since."

"Yes," said George Medlicott, "I agree, but there has to be change from time to time. Canon Barstow's been in his grave for a century. The School's still alive and in my view Rodney Webb's one of its best servants."

"Really? Do you think so?"

"Yes, I do, and I think you should try and see his point of view."

"You think I should agree to Picton being a monitor?"

"Picton's in my form. I know him fairly well. I'd say responsibility would do him good."

It was the right line to take with Dormer-Wills, but he was still resistant.

"We can't afford a scandal at Godsell, George. In my job I have to develop something like a sixth sense. If a boy's a bad influence the safest thing is to get rid of him. But it's madness, in my judgement, to put him in a position of authority. I can't agree to that, whatever I do. The furthest I can go is to see the two boys and make them understand how wicked they've been, but not impose any further punishment."

"Would you like me to put that to Rodney?"

"Do you think he'll accept it?"

"I don't know, Cecil. The trouble is that he's more or less committed himself to making Picton a monitor."

"He had no right at all."

"Still, I suppose you'd agree that your own approval of monitors is mainly a formal one. You can't know all the seniors in the School. It's the Housemaster who has chance his arm. I've sometimes put up a boy knowing too much about him for my

peace of mind. If I've got away with it, it's because the responsibility does the trick."

"So I have to approve of Picton, do I? What about McBain and Pooley? Do I have to fall in with Rodney Webb's perverse judgement in their case as well?"

The two men looked at each other as Dormer-Wills concluded his sarcastic questions. Remarkably, they both smiled and the edge was taken off the situation.

"Let me speak to Rodney," said George Medlicott. "I'll ask him to think over his attitude in each of these three cases and let you know to-morrow."

"You're being very persuasive, George."

With so much gained, the next step was to argue Rodney into acceptance and at the same time induce him to act generously. It was easy to imagine that the problem was entirely one of diplomacy, which could be settled by shuttling to and fro under the gaunt skeletons of the elm trees. But the human element, which had precipitated the whole affair, was still potentially decisive.

Tony Picton, coming into the library of Webb's to borrow a book on that Sunday evening, found his friend Philip Mallaby alone, kneeling in an arm-chair and looking along the row of titles in a shelf. He knew he should have left the room at once, but faltered in the intention because of an irresistible urge to go forward and stand close to the good-looking boy, who took no overt notice of him but continued to scan the battered spines of the works of John Buchan.

Tony lifted his hand, which trembled from the force of the temptation, and lightly twisted Philip's ear. The other did not suspend his stoical concentration on *Greenmantle*, as if that wholesome book might still save him from a moral lapse. He uttered a sound which was vaguely negative without being articulated into speech. Meanwhile, Tony prolonged the moment and even intensified his pleasure by leaning against Philip's crouching body.

"Come and stay in the hols, Phil," he invited. "It's on the river at Maidenhead."

There was an answering pressure which delighted him. It did not occur to him to apply to his Housemaster for advice and fortification.

"Only five full days of term left," he said, "and you can come home as soon as you like."

He stood still, weighing the idea of a still earlier assignation. He was aware that, as long as he kept the physical contact between his hand and Philip, the younger boy would respond to any order or suggestion which he might utter. But it was a dangerous game to play. He took away his hand and said:

"So long, Phil."

He left the library with all possible precaution, but once he was on the bare, hideous stairs he began to behave more naturally. Evidently he overdid this effect, for at the landing he came face to face with Ralph Norman who said:

"You look disgustingly pleased with yourself, Picton. What have you been doing? Using my bed for another of your orgies?"

The near-accuracy of the senior monitor's perception gave Tony a fright, but he succeeded in putting on a bland and contemptuous smile He thought of answering "No such luck, Norm," but that would have been to repeat the mistake made by Oscar Wilde at his trial. He simply stood aside in order to allow Ralph Norman and a friend of his, a games hero named Peter Dawson, to pass. They clattered down to the ground floor and Tony could hear Ralph Norman begin an over-loud confidence with the words:

"God help us if that poisonous creep really becomes a monitor."

His mood was to give up. He would see the Housemaster and refuse categorically to accept the unwanted promotion. Half seriously he pushed open the green baize door which led into the private part of the House, but he did not go through. In the dim illumination of the entrance hall he could see George Medlicott come in from outside, without knocking or ringing, and stalk across to the Housemaster's study. He approved of George Medlicott as almost the only master who lived up to his own standards of sophistication. Lazily he wondered what the two masters had to discuss, without suspecting that it was himself.

"I think I've got you peace on acceptable terms, as long as you don't insist on being a bloody fool," Medlicott said.

Rodney Webb was working on a pile of examination papers, from which he looked up with a wary expression.

"Am I usually such a bloody fool?"

"Sometimes you are." Medlicott stretched himself in a chair and crossed one ankle over the other knee. "Let me analyse your position *vis-à-vis* Cecil. You've given a risky undertaking to make Picton a monitor next term, knowing him to be an active homosexual. You feel you can't back out of that without losing face and appearing weak and unjust in Picton's and possibly other people's eyes."

"My own eyes," Rodney corrected quietly.

"All right. Now, in addition, you've recommended two others as monitors, who have got into trouble for heterosexual activities. When you discovered about these two you sent them up to the Headmaster, thereby giving him jurisdiction in their case. Therefore you lose no face if he decides that one or both are unfit to be monitors."

"My dear George, you're employing all your subtlety in order to draw a false distinction. The principle at stake is who is to choose the monitors and who is just to confirm them. Also, you've tactfully passed over the fact that Cecil wants to see Picton and Mallaby and give them a moral reprimand, which goes against all I believe in."

"Yet you gave a moral reprimand, didn't you, to the more orthodox couple, McBain and Pooley?"

"Yes, but that's different."

Rodney noticed the friendly mockery in George Medlicott's expression and asked:

"What do you want me to do?"

"Write Cecil a letter this evening. Put on record that in the Picton case you can't go back on what you've said and done, and that even a reprimand from him would weaken your policy. Be frank about the name of the second boy. Add that in the other case, which you've referred to him, you accept his judgement unreservedly."

"It sounds simple, doesn't it?"

"It *is* simple."

"Very well, then, I'll do my best."

When George Medlicott had gone, Rodney put aside his other work and got out the writing-paper headed. "Webb's House" in Gothic script.

"Dear Headmaster," he wrote.

The exercise, as described by George, was clear in his mind but he found it hard to continue. It was unthinkable to reveal his true thoughts and he did not possess a smooth style in which the truth could be wrapped up and hidden.

"I am sure you must think I have behaved with a lack of deference to your authority in the case of Anthony Picton and a boy with whom he has associated, whose name is Philip Mallaby. I have some knowledge of the problem of homosexuality. I am also in touch with an expert practitioner, as you know, whose advice has been at my disposal. I thus considered myself justified in making full use of the discretion vested in me in dealing with the case and I may add that there has been no resumption of the association between the two boys. In the circumstances I felt it right to allow Anthony Picton's name to stand among my recommendations for promotion to monitor. I regret that, as I told you, I cannot easily go back on this decision, which has been communicated to Picton himself. I also view with concern the intention, which I understand you have, of interviewing and reprimanding these boys, as such a course of action would deprive them of the sympathy which is a vital part of their treatment.

"As regards the case of Gavin McBain and Frank Pooley, which I referred to you for disciplinary action, it is of course within your powers to take such steps as you consider necessary and I shall accept your judgement unreservedly. Nevertheless, I feel it to be my duty—"

Rodney hesitated between crossing out this last sentence and crossing out the word "unreservedly" in order to be able to continue the sentence. Finally, in deference to the tall phantom of George Medlicott which he imagined as standing over him, he crossed out the last sentence and concluded the letter.

Only a few feet away, in the boys' Hall, another letter was being written which would presently cause further trouble for the Housemaster.

"Dear Sylvia," wrote Frank Pooley,

"It will be no news to you that I was in plenty of trouble over the visit which Gavin and I paid to your home. We were beaten by the Headmaster, only he doesn't actually do it himself but a master called Smart Alec does. I got ten, which is supposed to be a record. Gavin, who got eight, keeps saying it was worth it and I would like to say I agree, only the ring and knock at the door came a bit early, don't you think? Gavin and I were going to be monitors next term, but I think it is unlikely now.

"On Saturday we go home for the holidays, which in my case is fortunately quite close to you. On Friday we have Prize Giving and a sort of sing-song which is not much fun but is impossible to get out of. It goes on till about nine and Gavin and I could meet you and Doreen at nine-thirty at the arch under the railway line, where the path goes up from the School on to White Horse Down. Gavin says to tell you that he has a half-bottle of the best, so it will be worth your while. He says it is quite safe for us because nobody goes to bed early anyway and in any case it is too late by next day for the masters to do anything about it, if they wanted to.

"So, darling, till Friday night and keeping my fingers crossed that you and Doreen will be able to come.

"Much love from your Frank."

Because, in spite of McBain's assurances, Frank was apprehensive about the meeting and wanted to tie himself down before he thought better of it, he went out through the tradesmen's door to post the letter. On his way back he would have met Rodney if he had not prudently slipped into an opening in the wall. The Housemaster, holding his own letter, went past not in the brisk, young man's gait which was habitual with him and was called for by the chill of the night, but hesitantly, as if starting with reluctance on a long journey.

8

THE MATRON'S TALE

JUST as Joan Harrington's first revelation of scandal had been made during the visit of a Commander Bowen, her second and more disastrous incursion into the politics of Godsell School occurred while Rodney Webb was interviewing Ernest Picton, Tony Picton's father. This "cosmopolitan gentleman" turned out to be less exciting than the description promised. He was short, not exactly slim and nearly bald. For Rodney, who had formed an idea of him as a lady's man, it was hard to imagine what his appeal consisted in. His type was in outward appearance that of the moderately successful, carefully dressed, conformist businessman such as Rodney had often received in his study in the past.

"I don't know what to say about the news in your letter," Picton began. "I'm away a lot, you know, so I've not been closely in touch with Tony. His bringing up has rather been left to his mother. I'm surprised, really, that you didn't get in touch with her instead of me."

"I did consider it, but I knew from Tony you were at home."

"That's right. I expect he's told you that my wife and I were separated for a time. I suppose you'd call it incompatibility. Either that or the domestic life doesn't suit me. I like a bit of change now and again, myself."

Rodney wondered what sort of change was referred to. He asked:

"Does your business keep you away most of the time?"

"It does indeed. I'm a sort of salesman, you see, in the Latin-American market. I was fortunate enough to learn the Spanish lingo as a boy and it's served me well over earning my living. But it keeps me on the move."

"There's no possibility, then, that you might settle down and spend more time at home?"

"You mean for Tony's sake?"

Rodney nodded.

"It's a bit late in the day for that, Mr. Webb. The harm's all been done in my opinion. I was never in favour of a boarding-school for Tony. You take a boy, who's been spoilt by his mother and is 'that way inclined', as they call it, and you coop him up with a lot of other boys. What else can you expect?"

"Did you tell your wife what you thought, Mr. Picton?"

"I often tell my wife things, or I used to, but it doesn't make much difference. She's a very strong-minded woman and besides, she's the one who has the money. I don't pay the school bills, you know. It's she who does that, and the one who pays the piper calls the tune. I'm telling you all this so that you'll understand my situation."

"Yes, indeed. I'm grateful for your frankness."

"If you ask me, Mr. Webb, she's ruined that boy, but she's the last one who's going to admit it. Admitting error isn't in her nature. She's one of the ones who are always in the right, whatever happens."

"Don't you think," asked Rodney, "there may be some fault on your side as well? A son needs his father and if the father's missing at the crucial period the son will always suffer for it."

It was at this moment that Joan Harrington twisted the door-knob and appeared for a moment in full sight. Rodney, doing his best to convince the elder Picton, allowed himself a dismissive gesture, although he might easily have made an excuse and joined her at the door for a confidential word or two.

"Now you're lecturing me," Ernest Picton said, "and you have every right to."

Clearly he did not intend to put up with it, however, for he got to his feet with decision. Rodney could almost hear him announcing: "Time I was getting along." To forestall this he said rapidly:

"I'm still proposing to make Tony a monitor next term."

"Is that wise, do you think, Mr. Webb?"

"I believe the responsibility will do him good."

"Well, you know your own business best."

"Do you think it's a risky thing to do?"

Ernest Picton had remained standing, but now he sat down again in order to confront Rodney face to face.

"It's my experience as a man of the world," he said, "that differences between people have to be respected. It's no good thinking you can change them just because you want to change them. These people are excited by another man as you and I, if you'll excuse the expression, are excited by a woman."

Rodney Webb was careful not to look too disturbed by this proposition, in case his own normality should be cast in doubt.

"You don't seem to think," he said, "that Tony will find it easy to get over his trouble. I have to admit that a friend of mine, who's a specialist in these matters, rather agrees with you. He came down from London to spend a night with us, and I got him to have a talk with Tony. His advice was that Tony should look for balance of mind and even happiness within the limitation of being a homosexual."

"Yes, indeed," Picton agreed. "And is it even a limitation? If you travel the world as I do, you come across some very strange experiences, very strange indeed."

Rodney suspected that his visitor was about to add that travel broadened the mind, but Picton again rose to his feet and glanced at the watch embedded in his expanding waistline. He suggested:

"I'd like to take young Tony out, if that's permitted. I don't know what the rules are, I'm afraid."

"Well, it's not usually permitted on a weekday, but in the circumstances perhaps I should waive the rule."

"That's very obliging of you. Could you recommend a decent pub?"

Rodney, unused to slang, was on the point of saying that public houses were out of bounds, but understood in time that Picton meant a restaurant.

"I'm not a great expert," he had to explain, "but there's the White Horse, the Crown and the Railway Arms. I think I'd recommend the Crown in the High Street. It's where the parents usually go."

Rodney Webb went through into the Hall to call for Tony Picton, who had been waiting and appeared with alacrity at the prospect of a meal. He and his father drove off in a rather flashy white car which had been hired for the visit, to judge by the

sticker on the windscreen. Rodney stood looking after them with the mixture of exhaustion of the spirit and relief with which he surmounted each chore in the day. Almost at once he recollected the Matron, whose face had appeared for a moment at his study door. He re-entered the House and went up quickly to her room, which he found empty. The poker-work texts, the portrait of the Royal Family on the lawn at Sandringham and the small library of books, mostly by A. A. Milne, were in their places, but the dog-basket was untenanted by the Scottie.

Disconcerted, Rodney retreated to the drawing-room and asked Maud:

"What's happened to Joan Harrington?"

"Honestly, I've no idea. Why?"

"I was seeing Tony Picton's father when she burst into my study, looking like the wrath of God, and now she's disappeared."

"Are you worried, darling?"

"Not specially. It's just that I'm not sure of her loyalty any more. Didn't she tell you she was going to make trouble?"

"*Could* make trouble, actually."

"What do you think she meant?"

"I expect she was just putting the wind up me."

Rodney prowled out again and returned to the Matron's room. Through the crack of the door he could see that the light was on and the medicine cupboard, with its store of traditional remedies, wide open. Matron, as he entered, was pouring a dose from a bottle into a measuring glass. Rodney assumed that it was for herself and asked:

"Feeling out of sorts, Joan?"

"It wouldn't be surprising if I was," she retorted.

"Oh, really? Why's that?"

"I was looking for you. I had something important to tell you, that wouldn't wait."

"I was seeing a parent, as you know. What was it that you wanted to tell me?"

"Those two," said Joan Harrington deliberately, "have been at it again."

Dismay overwhelmed Rodney for a moment. There was no need for anyone to explain who the two were.

"Tony Picton's out with his father," he explained. "I fetched him myself. He didn't seem guilty. I can hardly believe it, Joan."

"If *you* don't, there are others who will."

"I don't understand."

"I thought it right to tell my friend Edith, as you couldn't find the time to come to the door and speak to me. The Headmaster had sent word by her, you see, that he was interested."

"But that's disloyal, Joan. It's personally disloyal to me."

As he spoke, Rodney knew that he was making a fruitless appeal. The Matron's face was ugly with resentment. She asked:

"Why should I be so particular? I'm put in my place by Maud and when I come to you you can't find the time to see me—"

"Listen. You're talking nonsense, Joan. You know I always have time for you, unless I'm actually engaged with some one."

It was difficult to sound convincing. Rodney's relations with Matron were only outwardly democratic and egalitarian. In truth she was underpaid and little more than a servant in his House. It was School tradition which decreed that she should be given genteel status. The Christian-name terms, therefore, were something of a mockery, used condescendingly on one side and hardly at all, or with a conscious effort, on the other. The resentment was close to the surface.

Joan Harrington had poured the measure of medicine to her own satisfaction.

"I'll just take this through, if you don't mind," she said.

"Who's it for, then?"

"Philip Mallaby. I've put him in the sick-room, poor lamb. If you ask me, he's more sinned against than sinning. It's your Tony Picton who causes all the trouble."

"Did you really catch them, Joan?"

"I've made my report. It's up to you, Rodney, if you want to report something different."

Joan Harrington bore her medicine glass with a trembling hand out of the room. The Housemaster followed her and experienced the feeling of "I have been here before" at sight of the attractive

and reprehensible boy. He waited until Philip had drunk the sedative and then said:

"So Tony's been at you again."

As he expected, the face on the pillow crumpled into facile tears. He did not persevere, but left the room and Matron's quarters with an impatience untypical of him. He felt bitter towards Tony Picton and considered driving to one or more of the hotels which he had recommended to the father, with the idea of surprising the pair at dinner and rudely terminating their festivity. But in the upshot he wandered back to Maud and perched on a stool in the kitchen, to which she had moved, while she dished up their own meal. Maud was undistinguished as a cook. She liked to recreate foreign dishes encountered on holidays, but usually, as with this evening's efforts, the secret had somehow become mislaid.

"What am I to do?" asked Rodney after explaining the situation. "I'd feel such a fool sitting down and writing another letter to explain that I was mistaken."

"You could telephone."

"That's an idea, I suppose."

"Or you could go round and talk to him."

"I don't fancy that. Old Cecil can be so damned humiliating when he's in the right. I think I'll sleep on it, Maud."

"Are you sure you're not funking it?"

"No."

"Do you mean you're not sure, or you're not funking it?"

"I mean I know I'm funking it, but I've had as much as I can take of Cecil."

Maud did not comment for the moment, with the result that Rodney burst out:

"All right. All right. I know perfectly well that I'm in the wrong, but I just don't intend to eat humble pie any more than I need to. For fifteen years I've been running a House and if I don't know how to do it by now I never shall. Naturally I make mistakes, but making mistakes is part of the business. Any Housemaster knows that, but not Cecil. According to him we should all be infallible."

Maud allowed him to run on without interruption, trying at the same time to manifest her sympathy. When, after a second helping of veal stew and a fruit pie—there was nothing wrong with his appetite—Rodney went to his study to work, she considered the position. It was clear to her that this was dangerous and that Rodney was not going the right way about reducing the danger. She could not be his wife without being aware that his status in the School was vital to his self-respect and well-being. Therefore it would be useful to discover how seriously he was already compromised in the Headmaster's eyes. While Rodney was waiting for the return of the Pictons, it occurred to her that she would have time for a brief conversation with Dormer-Wills. No harm was likely to result and there might be an exchange of sympathy which would be beneficial to Rodney. She did not consult him, simply because she knew that he would not agree.

A man going on such an errand would perhaps have written down a few points on paper, or at any rate ordered the arguments in his mind. Maud, on the contrary, simply snatched up a coat and head-scarf and hurried off, taking care to use the service door so as not to be heard by her husband. She was confident that she would find the right words when she needed them. In the mean time her brain was busy with observations of the light patter of rain, the sheen of light on a shallow puddle of water and the few figures still moving about in an otherwise deserted world.

All the windows at the front of the Headmaster's house were dark, which indicated that he was probably in the study, which gave on to the courtyard on the other side. Maud hammered gently with the knocker. She expected Dormer-Wills to admit her himself, but it was Bellows the manservant who opened the door already dressed for returning home.

"Don't bother about me," Maud said, slipping past him "I just want a few words with Dr. Dormer-Wills."

Bellows, who had slow reactions, seemed on the point of uttering something, but Maud was already opening the door into the study. She was surprised and disconcerted to find that the Headmaster was not alone. He was seated on one side of the fireplace while on the other was a person who seemed at first sight to be his

elder brother: small, neat, grey-haired and grave in manner. Both of them had glanced up as Maud entered the room, but they did not immediately move to greet her. She had an impression that they had been discussing something connected with her and she tried to snatch the echo of their last words out of the air, but without success.

"Maud!" said the Headmaster with belated civility. "How very nice and unexpected to see you. You know Sir William Nutting, don't you?"

In fact she scarcely did, but knew he was one of the Governors of Godsell whom Dormer-Wills was most apt to consult. She shook hands and was persuaded to sit down between the two men.

"I'm sure you're very busy," she began. "Perhaps I'd better go away and come back at a more convenient time. I wanted to have a private word about my husband."

The two elderly men exchanged a look.

"Sir William," said Dormer-Wills, "is in the picture about recent happenings. In fact we were discussing them when you came in. So I'm sure you can speak quite frankly, if you wish."

Only now did Maud bring her intellect consciously to bear on the problem which had motivated her visit.

"My husband's rather a modern person in some ways," she said. "He's read a good deal about psychology and new methods of treating difficult cases. Often he's very successful in dealing with a boy in the House, without anyone but ourselves and the boy being any the wiser. But sometimes he isn't so successful and then it all goes wrong and it's very worrying."

"It is indeed." Dormer-Wills nodded affirmatively. "We have rules, you see, which need to be kept."

"But Rodney's so full of good-will," Maud said enthusiastically. "If he's at fault, it's because he's such a good man and so trusting. Sometimes boys let him down, but that isn't to say that he was wrong to give them a chance."

Again the two hierarchs confirmed by a look that they were in agreement. Dormer-Wills said:

"I'd like Sir William to tell you his opinion about experimental methods and how we view them at Godsell, if he wouldn't mind."

Apprehensively, Maud swivelled round to face the Governor. She was afraid that her arguments might have sounded rather light-weight in the present company.

"Certainly," Sir William agreed. "I'm sure I don't need to explain that I'm in favour of experiment in the right place. My career is sufficient proof of that, I think, even if it's immodest to say so."

"Yes, indeed."

"I have nothing against progressive methods, as I say, but I venture to think that Godsell is a special case. All of us here have a feeling of veneration towards Canon Barstow. Without him, Godsell would never have existed and it's our duty to stand by him and his ideas. One of these ideas, as I'm sure you know, was that there couldn't be any compromise between good and evil. Barstow was almost ruthless in shutting the door against evil, in whatever form. As a result, Godsell has a reputation all of its own among the schools. It's not the cleverest school, nor the most athletic, but in my opinion it's the best in moral character, still today. Now, how are we going to keep it like that and continue to attract the right sort of parents? Not, I'm afraid, Mrs. Webb, by giving free lodging to every easy-going liberal attitude that comes knocking on our doors. It's all very well to say that perversion is due to causes outside the boy's own control. That may be true or it may not. Personally, I believe a good boy will know how to resist temptation. And bad boys I'm afraid we're better off without. Does my point of view seem a little harsh?"

"Not to me, William," Dormer-Wills quickly assured him.

As for Maud Webb, she had allowed her mind to free-wheel during the Governor's discourse, even though her face had continued to register spellbound attention. She had been accustomed during her early life to listen to moral talk. On her marriage to Rodney she had duly made the transition to liberalism, but she had no fluent command of its arguments. Sir William's world was more familiar to her and more restful.

"I'm sure my father would have agreed with you," she said.

Dormer-Wills explained: "Maud's father was Archdeacon Spurling."

"Indeed? Then I'm sure I need say no more. Spurling would have been more eloquent than I am."

Maud murmured something polite, but her mind was fixed upon what to her was the main problem.

"I'm still worried for Rodney's sake," she said.

Again there was a glance of complicity between Nutting and Dormer-Wills, who told her:

"I'm sure you can count upon your husband remaining a valued member of our Staff."

"A Housemaster?" asked Maud, seizing with her intuition on the crucial point.

The Headmaster's eyes veiled themselves over as if their owner had made a temporary retreat from the scene. He did not even look embarrassed. He simply ceased to be present to all intents and purposes. It was Sir William Nutting who confided with a certain gentleness of manner:

"Nothing's been decided yet, Mrs. Webb."

"And how shall I know when it is decided?" asked Maud.

"We can arrange that you're told. Don't you agree, Cecil?" The Headmaster came back out of the half-world into which he had escaped.

"Yes, of course, William," he said. "I'll make certain that Maud is the first to know."

"That's kind of you. It means a lot to me. I'm very grateful."

Maud had stood up and the two men hovered round her as she took her leave. Then they returned to their chairs.

"A charming woman," Sir William said, and added as if he were afraid of being accused: "Well, it's true, isn't it? We haven't decided anything."

"It's quite true, William. Our thoughts are moving in a certain direction, but we haven't decided."

"Exactly. We'd like to see how Rodney Webb reacts to the new situation."

Rodney was reacting by moving quickly to his front door at the sound of the bell. He hoped to catch the elder as well as the

younger Picton, but the white hired car was already accelerating up the road and Tony was waiting alone on the step.

"Come in, Tony," Rodney invited. Did you have a good dinner?"

"Ghastly, actually, sir."

"I need to have a talk with you. You'd better come into the study."

At that time of night the study was cheerless. The electric fire, in which one bar was defective, was insufficient to repel the intense cold.

"Is it something important?" Tony asked.

"It is, rather. I gather from Matron that you've ignored my instructions, which were quite specific. She caught you again with Philip Mallaby, didn't she?"

"Yes, in a manner of speaking, I suppose."

"You don't seem too sure."

"Well, she caught us together and you said we weren't to meet for any purpose. So I'm afraid I have to plead guilty."

"Why didn't you come to me?"

"I didn't think you'd be particularly sympathetic. I did warn you, you know, that you were making a mistake about appointing me a monitor."

"What were you doing when Matron caught you?"

"Hasn't she told you?" asked Tony. "I expected that she'd give you all the lurid details."

The boy's manner was superficially confident, but Rodney noticed an underlying nervousness.

"What are these details?" he demanded.

"I saw Philip going into the jakes." This was the Godsell word for lavatory. "I thought I'd talk to him, so I stopped him bolting the door. It was the one on the sick-room landing, you see."

"Let me get this straight. Are you admitting to me that you were in the sick-room jakes at the same time as Philip Mallaby, after all the warnings I'd given both of you?"

"That's Matron's story, I'm afraid, and I'm not really able or willing to refute it."

"What was Mallaby doing there, in any case?"

"Well, as you know it's the only jakes with any privacy. Not everybody wants to be exposed to the public gaze on these occasions. I suppose Philip had got in the way of it through being in the sick-room."

"And what were you doing there, Tony?"

"Oh, just hanging around."

"I see." Rodney considered, knowing all too well the effect which such revelations would have on the Headmaster. "I shall have to withdraw my recommendation of you as a monitor."

"I'm sure that's sensible, sir."

"You'd better go to bed now. It may be necessary for you to see the Headmaster in the morning."

"And get the Meadows treatment?"

"I don't know. The Headmaster will have to come to his own decision."

"Oh well, good night."

"Good night, Tony."

Maud, in her head-scarf and her thick coat, came in through the front door. She and Rodney, who had emerged into the hall, confronted each other but asked no questions. They were both subconsciously aware how dangerous the answers might be.

9

PRIZE GIVING

IT was a tradition at Godsell that it was possible to commit almost any misdemeanour on Prize Giving, the last day of the term, and escape the consequences. The festivities went on until late at night; and in the morning it was permissible to leave the premises at any hour, however early. Boys had been known to keep a taxi ticking up the fare outside while they went back into their House to carry out some wanton act of vandalism.

The Prize Giving itself took place in Barstow Hall, which was above and on either side of the archway in the heart of the School buildings. Because of a lack of provision on the part of the Founder, there was hardly room for the whole scholastic body. The School had increased in size towards the end of the Victorian Age and both the Chapel and the Hall had become inadequate. A deep-rooted conservatism, however, had preserved them in their original state even if the boys were crowded together in an unseemly way or forced to stand or sit on the floor.

Almost all the top prizes, in this particular term, had been won by a boy named Solomon, small in stature but self-confident and even vainglorious. On each occasion his name was called and nothing appeared to be happening since the boy on his way up to the Headmaster's throne was concealed by the ranks of standing monitors. At last his diminutive figure emerged and stood facing the throne amid cheers that were half mocking. Young Solomon and Cecil Dormer-Wills were like members of a race of pygmies superior in brain-power to the well-grown youths hemming them in: an impression which became stronger as the same prize-winner returned again and again, to ever louder cheering.

Frank Pooley had secured a place high on top of a bookcase, from which he had an overall view of the ceremony. An attaché case containing various provisions was wedged in beside him. It was legal or at least customary to provide these for the sing-song, but Frank had in mind the meeting with the girls afterwards. Gavin McBain, who had not bothered to attend the ceremony in

the Hall, was making himself responsible for bringing a borrowed motor-rug.

In Frank's mind the pleasure in anticipation of the event was balanced by apprehension over possible consequences. Needless to say, McBain had made light of these and the Scottish boy's influence had been behind the letter to Sylvia. Now, as the meeting came closer, something of the enormity and daring of holding it on White Horse Down became more apparent.

The Headmaster left the Hall in good time for dinner and the sing-song began, as was obligatory, with the end-of-term hymn *Vale, Godsellia*. Other items from the official songbook followed in the shape of *Bat and Ball* and *Balaclava*. *She'll be Coming round the Mountain* was a decline from this high standard and was marked by the break-up of ordered attendance in Barstow Hall. Boys began to roam about the courtyards, flashing their torches and singing in a desultory fashion. Only the keen vocalists remained behind and were heard at a distance, behind the lighted windows over the archway, by the others.

This was the opportunity which Frank Pooley and Gavin McBain had it in mind to exploit. It was usual for cheap sherry or beer to be consumed in odd corners about the School and walks about the surrounding country-side were also regarded as normal, when pursued in male company. Frank was careful not to seem to be hurrying away. He joined in a chorus and then edged out of the torch-light. It was a quarter past nine by the dial of his illuminated watch.

There was a short cut by way of a cinder path over the meadows, leading to the railway line. From some distance Frank could see the outline of a tree which marked the passage under the permanent way. He approached with caution and walked on tiptoe when he reached the metalled surface of the road. The black hole of the entrance in the side of the embankment appeared deserted. Frank stood beside it and was looking back along the way by which he had come when a muffled giggle sounded. He stooped down into the unsavoury darkness, straining his eyes in the effort to recognize human figures. At once hands plucked at him. There were soft whispers and he recognized his

own Sylvia's voice and scent, but it was difficult to tell which was she in the confusion of feminine clothes and bodies. He whispered "Hullo" and attempted a peck of a kiss, whereupon he found Doreen's unfamiliar mouth pressed against his. Both girls giggled again and he felt proud and happy at being admitted so generously to their company, as if the obscurity had removed any need for nice distinctions. Standing between them, and interlaced with both in spite of the case which he was still holding, he turned between one and the other.

This interlude was ended when McBain came across the roadway and called out:

"Is anyone there?"

He, with his folded rug and his whisky and his experienced style with girls, became the centre of attention. The small bottle was passed between the four of them "to fortify us for the climb."

"Where are we going, Gavin?"

"Up to the white horse, where we intend to celebrate the old pagan rites."

"What are they when they're at home?"

"Promise you won't tell your mother?"

"Cross my heart. She wouldn't understand, anyway."

"Well, the Godsellites used to gather on a certain part of the horse's anatomy at various seasons of the year. You must forgive me if I don't go into details about the actual nature of the ceremony before it begins."

"Let's go, Gavin. I can't wait."

Gavin McBain and Doreen went ahead on the zig-zag path and could be seen stopping frequently to embrace. Frank had the wish to emulate them but Sylvia, although she held on to him affectionately, was more concerned with getting up the steep slope in her high-heeled shoes. When they reached the fence she said she was exhausted and leaned her head against his shoulder. Feeling much more grown-up than he had ever done before, he stroked her protectively. Then he held the strands of wire apart while she climbed through the fence surrounding the figure of the white horse.

Gavin McBain was laying out the motor-rug at the spot which he considered appropriate. This caused no sensation, as it was difficult to draw artistic conclusions from the dim lines of chalk receding in each direction. The slope was steep, so that they had to use one of these diagonal furrows as a foot-rest, to prevent themselves from sliding down.

"The first part of the ceremony," said Gavin, "consists of the nuptial feast. Let's see what we've got."

He opened the case which Frank had been carrying. In some confusion it contained cold sausages, miniature pork pies, potato crisps, short-bread and nut milk chocolate. There was also the whisky, which Doreen was punishing more heavily than the others. She was excited by McBain's ritual programme and asked:

"What's the next stage?"

"An examination of the antiquities, my love."

"You sound as if you'd swallowed a dictionary, Gavin. What comes after that?"

He whispered in her ear and she gave a chuckle which Frank found disturbing. McBain began to pull her up the hill to a point ludicrously high where, he maintained, the horse's erection had culminated. Frank Pooley and Sylvia followed and were commanded by McBain to slide down the slope of grass as far as the motor-rug, which was still just visible. Sylvia, however, insisted on standing aside while the other couple gave a demonstration. Doreen, who was laughing uncontrollably, seated herself between Gavin's outstretched legs. When he let go they slid away on the steep grass, turned sideways, clutched at each other and fetched up in disorder twenty feet below, where the rug formed a sort of safety net.

Frank was preparing to repeat the unedifying action, but Sylvia had another idea. She pointed across to the edge of the enclosed area, where there was a slight hollow invaded by meagre shrubs from outside the fence. Tottering more insecurely than ever on her unsuitable shoes, she began to pull Frank after her across the slope. He resisted at first under the impression that they were expected to follow the other couple, but no summons or other sign of encouragement came from below. On second thoughts, he

guessed that the girls had agreed on separation at a midway stage in the proceedings, as they had done on the night of the visit to the Rendezvous Café. He accordingly yielded to Sylvia's persistent tug and was presently standing with her in the hollow, which was a more convenient site than the one which they had abandoned.

Sylvia bent down and felt the grass with the back of her fingers. Then she slipped an arm out of her coat and Frank helped her to take it off and spread it on the ground. She was calm, almost remote, while he could hardly keep the excitement out of his voice as he asked:

"Will you be warm enough, darling?"

"I've got you, haven't I? Come down beside me, silly."

His awkwardness disappeared when he found himself close to her. He kissed her with what he hoped was an increasing passion which would sweep her away, but soon realized that she was playing a limited game of which she knew all the rules. The whispered conversation between them became an argument plaintive on his side and firm on hers.

"Why not, darling?"

"Because I say. That's why."

"Is it because we've only met once before?"

"Yes, that and other reasons."

"Doreen does, doesn't she?"

"Yes, but she's been in trouble before now and will be again, before she's much older."

Frank discovered that, within the set limitation, much was permitted and even encouraged. If he had some feeling of disappointment, this was balanced by a secret relief at not being put to the test.

After their play they fell into a doze in which time was marked by the increasing effect of the cold and the dampness round them. They were disturbed by the sound of a man's voice shouting something over and over again. Frank raised his head above the bushes and could see a light on the slope below them and to the side, where Doreen and Gavin could be presumed to be. The contour was such that the light, which evidently came from a powerful torch, appeared almost level with the ground and the

figures of the drama were cut off at waist level. It was clear that some sort of struggle was in progress, in the course of which the torch withdrew itself farther down the slope. Frank felt the need to intervene, but Sylvia knelt up and held him back with a hand on his arm.

"We don't want trouble," she said.

"What do you think's happened?"

"It's the farmer. I expect he's taking your friend down to the School."

"Then I must help him."

"You can't leave me here. I'd never get down by myself, with my high heels."

Frank looked irresolutely after the vanishing light. "You know about the farmer, do you?"

"I've heard about him. He's always on about sex, one of my girl friends says."

The time, Frank Pooley saw from his watch, was twenty to ten. If the farmer was making for the Headmaster's house, it was important to get back to Webb's before there was a general alarm. Frank had entered into the expedition in an uncalculating mood of defiance. Now that the trap was about to close, he had a shameful desire to save himself at any cost. Thus he pressed Sylvia to hurry, supporting her down the outline of the white horse and under the wire to the underpass and the road. Of Gavin McBain or Doreen there was no sign.

"Well, good-bye, darling," he said.

"Aren't you taking me home, then?"

"I can't now. I'd get myself expelled. I'll write to you, though. We'll meet during the holidays."

"Well, that's a nice way to treat somebody."

But Sylvia was fairly philosophic, knowing that if she walked fast she was in time for the last bus back to her parents' house. After leaving her Frank took the short cut and hastened through the School grounds, in which a light or two still flickered and a few voices were still raised in song. Webb's appeared disconcertingly dark and deserted, but the door was still open and he slipped inside without drawing attention to himself. The relief

of escape, however, did not last for long. McBain was still unaccounted for and remained even more so when the House was shut up. Frank began to feel a traitor and was alert for any sign that his treachery had come to light. The conversation in the dormitory, which was on the subject of whether a schoolmaster was strictly speaking a gentleman, seemed meaningless to him.

When the indignant farmer had arrived with his captive at the Headmaster's house, the windows were in darkness and the doorbell remained unanswered. However, the apparition of the couple caused some stir. Alec Meadows, on being called, produced a key to the door out of the courtyard and explained that Cecil Dormer-Wills had gone from Prize Giving to a formal dinner given for him by some of the Governors. He telephoned to the hotel where this was being held. The Headmaster, he reported, would be back in about half an hour at the most. McBain massaged his wrist, which was stiff from having been twisted behind his back, while the farmer gave an interminable account of the discovery of the couple *in flagrante delicto*. This became so boring with repetition that a reluctant community of interest was created between McBain and Alec Meadows. They exchanged glances of sympathy as for the third time Doreen's appearance at the moment of discovery was described. The farmer, Ted Bywaters, possessed an inflamed, self-righteous face in which the evidences of alcohol and religion were mingled with discontent.

"What happened to the girl?" asked Alec Meadows for the sake of saying something.

"She kicked out at me," Bywaters recounted. "I let go of her for a second and the boy here told her to make herself scarce. I couldn't get at her because he was holding me back, see? Proper tricked me, they did, but I know where to find her if I want.

"You know the girl's name, do you?"

"I don't know her name, but I know what sort she is."

"Do you know her name, McBain?"

"I just know her as Doreen, Captain Meadows."

This was playing the game as the Captain understood it and he gave McBain another glance of complicity. Gavin profited from this by asking, over the head of the farmer:

"In confidence, what do you think I shall get?"

"The boot, I suppose."

"Do you really?"

"I imagine so. The alternative's been tried. Was Pooley with you, by the way?"

"Pooley?" repeated Gavin McBain blandly, without any expression on his face. "No. Why should he be?"

"Oh, no particular reason."

Bywaters had been watching them with swivelling eyes, like a spectator at Wimbledon.

"There was nobody else," he confirmed. "I'd have seen them if there was."

"Well, that's one good thing."

The Headmaster, his short figure attired in evening dress and gown, brought them all to their feet and the mark of respect put them in his power more than would normally have been the case. He was trembling visibly with annoyance and irritation.

"Well, what is it, Alec?" he asked. "Who's this person, will you kindly tell me?"

"It's Mr. Bywaters from the farm on White Horse Down. He says he caught McBain with a girl on the horse itself."

Alec Meadows's words were chosen in such a way that it was crystal clear to the Headmaster what had happened, but Bywaters thought fit to fill in the picture in his own infinitely cruder style.

"I could have gone straight to the police," he finished, "but I thought it right to come to you in the first place."

The implication of blackmail, however vague and tenuous, did not find any favour with Dormer-Wills.

"You must do as you please," he said, "but what you've told me is a matter of internal discipline. It concerns the School and the School alone. I'm obliged to you for reporting the matter, but I don't think I need detain you any further. I'm sure Captain Meadows will make a note of how we can reach you, in case that should become necessary."

The farmer's large form seemed to swell to a greater size with the resentment which he was bottling up, but the diminutive Headmaster had an authority like a whip. Bywaters moved away to

the door, turned as if to launch some verbal thunderbolt and then went silently and as if gravely wounded. But the Headmaster's contempt was not exhausted. He asked:

"Was it necessary to bring that vulgarian into my study?"

"I thought it wise, Headmaster. He was making a song and dance outside."

"Yes, I'm not blaming you, Alec."

Gavin McBain had so far been virtually ignored and it was with apprehension that he awaited his turn. But instead of anger the Headmaster brought a deadly coolness to bear on him.

"Do you contest the farmer's account of your evening's activity, McBain?" Dormer-Wills asked.

"No, sir. Not apart from the style."

The Headmaster was not amused.

"It's been made amply clear, McBain, that it's no use applying a deterrent to you in the form of corporal punishment. Presumably you don't possess the intelligence to draw the right conclusion. I'm therefore driven to take the next step, namely to expel you from Godsell."

"My pater won't like that, sir," McBain pointed out.

"Your pater's a very gallant officer in the Forces, McBain, but he's not in charge of discipline in this School."

"No, I realize that, sir. It's just that I know he's very keen on my following him into his Regiment and this will set me back."

"The time to think of that, McBain, was before you took it on yourself to flout my authority."

"Yes, I know I'm to blame, sir. I can hardly hope to become a monitor, but I do ask you to reconsider expelling me."

"I've reached my decision. I'm not prepared to reconsider it. You're a bad influence and Godsell will be better off without you. You'll leave the School to-morrow morning and I shall write to your pater that you're not wanted here any more."

"Does it have to be an official expulsion, sir?"

"Yes, it does. That's all, McBain."

Dormer-Wills assumed his most freezing attitude of dignity and Alec Meadows prudently effaced himself while Gavin McBain left the room. After his departure there was silence for a moment or

two as the Headmaster searched for a paper on his desk. It was a letter written by Rodney Webb, confessing to a mistake over the nomination of Tony Picton as a monitor.

"How would you like to be a Housemaster, Alec?" Dormer-Wills asked, twisting the letter round and round with his thumb and forefinger.

At Webb's House, McBain rang the bell in order to gain admittance. Rodney Webb, in pyjamas and dressing-gown, came down to let him in.

"Why are you so late?" he asked.

"Well, actually, I've just been expelled. What worries me even more is that I've lost a perfectly good motor-rug, for which I shall presumably have to pay the person from whom I borrowed it."

Gavin McBain smiled at his Housemaster, trying to conceal the serious jolt to his career under his usual urbanity. While they were discussing the matter in the study Rodney Webb expected the telephone to ring and Cecil Dormer-Wills to confirm the disciplinary action involving a boy in his House, as would have been right and proper. But midnight came and went, McBain withdrew to spend his last night at the School and the instrument was still silent. Gradually Rodney began to understand that his relations with the Headmaster had been severed for good and all.

10

A PERSONAL LETTER

CECIL Dormer-Wills, at ease in the unhurried atmosphere of the first day of the Christmas holidays, could turn his full attention upon the case of Rodney Webb. His tidy soul was irritated by the muddle which had been allowed to occur. The punishment of two boys and the expulsion of one of them had only touched the fringes of the problem. The heart of the matter was unsatisfactory leadership and the true culprit was the Housemaster whose mistaken liberalism gave an automatic protection to malefactors as long as there was some element of compassion in their case. A change was needed and could best be made now, at the beginning of the holidays, before every one packed up and went away. "I must harden myself," Dormer-Wills thought, but it was a formalistic rather than a genuine thought. At the bottom of his nature he was pleased to be able to replace Rodney by some one with a conventional attitude to morality and discipline. Godsell, since its foundation, had never been short of such efficient masters.

"Kindly take a letter, Edith," said the Headmaster, "to Mrs. Rodney Webb."

He paused, wondering whether he should not write in his own hand, but he preferred to have a copy of such an important communication on file.

"Make it a personal letter," he said. "Leave room for me to write in 'Dear Maud' and a few words at the end."

"Yes, Headmaster."

"'The other night, when we were having a chat with Sir William Nutting, I made you a promise that you would be the first to know of any decision affecting your husband and his position in the School.

"'I am sorry to say that such a decision has now been taken. I am perfectly sure in my own mind that Rodney Webb has a great deal more to contribute to Godsell both as a teacher and as an influence on the Staff. I do feel, however, that it is time his House passed into other hands. It would be out of place for me, in a

personal letter, to go into whys and wherefores of recent happenings. Let it suffice to say that I am making new arrangements for next term and that I should like the change to be carried out during the holidays.

"'Please do not imagine that I have left you and your personal welfare out of account in coming to what may seem to be a harsh resolution. I am asking the Bursar to let you have No. 10, Carlton Close, which as you know became vacant on the sad death of Dr. Treadgold last month. I am only too well aware of the burden which, in an age which has turned its back upon domestic service, rests on the shoulders of the Housemaster's wife. At Carlton Close, with its delightful garden, I am confident that you will enjoy more peace and serenity than has been possible for many a long year.'

"Just one small point, Edith," the Headmaster added in a different tone. "After 'delightful' you might insert the words 'albeit small', in commas of course."

"Yes, Headmaster."

"I was wondering, too, if we ought to put in an 'alas'—'than has, alas, been possible.' What do you think?"

Edith Foster, flattered as always at being included in the pains of authorship, put her head on one side in an attitude conveying shrewd discrimination.

"I think we're better off without the 'alas'," she declared.

"So be it, then. And we'll go on: 'The closing of a chapter is always a sad occasion, but I am sure that you and your husband will loyally recognize the necessity and continue your work in good heart.' That's all, Edith, for that one."

Edith Foster omitted to make any acknowledgement. She looked towards the Headmaster in a timid and puzzled fashion.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked, as if a pair of commas or a semicolon were still in question.

"Nothing really, Headmaster. I'm sure you know best. But I must say I was wondering a little at your writing to Mrs. Webb in the first instance. After all it's Mr. Webb who's having to give up his House."

"Yes, you're quite right to raise the point, Edith, but I did make a promise in Sir William's presence. Of course, I shall be writing to Rodney Webb more officially, in due course. Now let's just do a note to the Bursar, shall we, about Carlton Close?"

Edith Foster still maintained her uneasy expression, but she could not avoid registering the fact that, however tactfully, she had been put in her place. If she were to raise the matter again without allowing a decent interval to elapse, she would simply be courting serious reproof. Her closeness to the Headmaster and her sympathetic understanding of his character and intelligence sometimes enabled her to notice mistakes while they could still be suppressed. A secretary, however, was not a wife or a companion on a footing of equality. Particularly in view of Cecil Dormer-Wills's sulky temper when he was opposed or thwarted, Edith's chief concern was never to go too far. Her influence depended on her being content with her inferiority.

As she rose, creaking a little after the uncomfortable session on her hard chair, Captain Meadows knocked and entered the study from the courtyard. He was evidently disturbed about something, for without any apology he crossed the room in a few rapid strides and laid a card on the desk in front of the Headmaster. Edith Foster paused inconspicuously, taking her time over snapping the elastic band round her note-book. She was just too far away to read what was written on the card, but she had never in her term of service seen Cecil Dormer-Wills so visibly upset and wounded as when he looked up from his inspection of it. His face was lifeless, more sallow even than usual, and with the shut expression which conveyed his extreme of displeasure.

"Where was this?" he asked.

Edith knew from experience that she should now make herself scarce, in order to save herself the indignity of being told "That's all" or "You can go." But she heard the answer before she got to the door.

"On the notice-board, Headmaster."

"On the notice-board."

Dormer-Wills repeated the words incredulously and turned the card over. On the reverse, in his own handwriting, was the

announcement of a lecture on "St. Paul and the Modern Age" by the Headmaster. The lecture had been delivered several days previously, so some inefficiency had been involved in leaving it on display when it no longer conveyed any valid message. But that was a trivial fault compared with what was written in block capitals on the side which had been shown to the world overnight: "SEX IS FUN" BY THE HEADMASTER.

His first impulse was to tear it up, but he considered in time that it might be useful as evidence and locked it away in one of the drawers of his desk.

"What do you think, Alec?" he asked. "Who could have done such a thing?"

"I can't imagine, Headmaster."

"I believe I can imagine. It was some one in that House, I'm sure."

"Webb's, you mean."

"Yes, Webb's."

In his mind Dormer-Wills identified the House with the Housemaster. Rodney Webb was responsible, in some unexplained fashion, for the obscene and insulting notice on the board. When, after Alec Meadows's departure, Edith came in with the typed letter to Maud, he filled in the writing at the head and foot with relish.

"It's to go by hand, immediately," he said.

"And you'll be writing to Mr. Webb later?"

"Yes, later perhaps."

The letter caught Maud Webb as she was on the point of setting out to do her shopping. She put her basket down and stood reading at the top of the steps while the messenger, a young assistant porter, withdrew in haste. The envelope fluttered down out of her hand. She turned, pushed the front door open and called:

"Rodney! Rodney!"

The genuine and unmistakable note of anguish brought Rodney out of his study in a moment. No words were necessary. Maud held out the letter and he took it.

"But this is fantastic," he said, turning back and reading it again from the beginning. "Why does he write to you, when I'm the one who's being sacked?"

"He made me a promise, you see. I had a presentiment that this was coming and I went round one evening when he was with Sir William Nutting."

"Yes, it says something about a promise here, but that doesn't really affect the matter, does it? I'm the one he has to give notice to."

"Perhaps he has, Rodney. Perhaps another letter's on its way."

"How did this one come?"

Maud stooped down, picked up the envelope with its legend in red typescript "By hand" and showed it to him.

"One of the porters brought it, darling. I was just going out."

"If there had been two letters he'd have brought them both together. Cecil's an efficient administrator, if he's anything at all."

"I shouldn't be too certain. He may need to look up details of your terms of service, or your salary or something. I can think of lots of reasons why the letter to you might have been delayed. I mean, I shouldn't draw conclusions too soon."

"Oh, I agree. At this stage I'm only speculating. I'll give him twenty-four hours and then get George Medlicott to do a little discreet spying."

"What are you hoping for, Rodney?"

"I suppose I'm hoping that Cecil has slipped up and that the Staff will take a poor view of the way he's gone about things."

Maud was tempted to say that such a hope was a long shot, but her intuition warned her that Rodney needed comfort above everything.

"I can perfectly well leave my shopping till later," she suggested. "Let's go for a walk and try and talk it over calmly."

"All right. I'll get my coat."

They shut the front door behind them and went out by the garden way, so as to reach the grass and trees more quickly. Both of them walked as if in blinkers, without daring to take any interest in a garden which might not belong to them in a week or

two's time. Just outside the gate, by sheer chance, they ran into Colonel Wilson, the Bursar.

"Are you thinking of going away for the festivities?" he asked.

"No, we'll be staying," Maud answered.

"Oh well, that's all right, then. It's just that we'll need to have a talk some time. I heard from the Headmaster this morning that he wants you to have 10 Carlton Close. It was the first I'd heard that you were moving and it's not quite as easy as he seems to imagine. I expect you know that Dr. Treadgold set fire to the place, trying to do his own cooking. It was a wonder he didn't burn it down, himself included. Some one saw the smoke and sent for the fire brigade."

"Yes, we heard about it," said Maud, getting ready to walk on.

Rodney broke in: "I shouldn't be too certain that we're going to leave Webb's."

"Really? I'm so sorry. I had no idea that the matter was in doubt, or I wouldn't have raised it."

"It's quite all right."

The Bursar, obviously ruffled in spirit, raised his hat to reveal his glossy, bald head. The Webbs smiled at him in an artificial manner. Maud took Rodney's arm and pulled him away.

"Now you've done it," she said without any severity.

"Done what, darling?"

"You've served notice that you're challenging the Headmaster's authority, that's all. It's a fairly shocking idea to old Jumbo."

"Jumbo's capable of being shocked by anything, including all references to sex, religion and the Monarchy. But what interests me is that he's heard from Cecil, as you have, but I haven't. You must admit that it begins to look curiouser and curiouser."

They went through the fence under the bare elm trees and along the edge of the squash-court block. A gravelled pathway brought them to the edge of the playing-fields and there, in the middle distance, was the diminutive figure of the Headmaster coming back from his morning constitutional. He was crossing their front at right angles and as he was still approaching it was obvious that he must have seen them. However, his glance wavered and seemed to fix itself on the School buildings two or

three hundred yards away. It became clear that he was intending to cut them, or at least cut Rodney, for presumably he would have greeted Maud had she been on her own.

Rodney Webb's reaction was to turn rather violently in the opposite direction, lugging Maud round with him, so as to give the impression that they had no idea of crossing the Headmaster's path.

"The little shit," he said, "daring to do this to me after I've served the School for half my lifetime."

He was almost blinded by emotion and Maud needed to guide him by the arm, or he would have stumbled into the rails of the cricket pavilion.

"The bloody little shit," he repeated, raising his voice as if in hopes that it would carry as far as the trim, buoyant, figure receding along the centre of the strip of turf.

"Don't get worked up, darling," said Maud.

"Yes, I bloody well shall if I want to."

Rodney laughed in a slightly unnatural way, which allowed Maud to realize that he had got control of himself again. He told her:

"Pride comes before a fall, my God."

They crossed the playing-fields and Rodney was taking the cinder path towards the railway line and the ascent to the white horse, but Maud protested:

"I haven't got the right shoes, darling. It's no good expecting me to go climbing."

"All right. We'll walk as far as the chalk pit."

From this feature on the edge of the Downs, the entrance to which formed a kind of platform, they were able to look back along the full length of the playing-fields. The School buildings at the end were in miniature, composing what seemed a harmonious group. Here and there a white facing caught the wintry sunshine and sparkled through the bare boughs of the trees.

"I suppose I'm mad," Rodney said, "to care so much. I'm well qualified. I could perfectly well get a job with an L.E.A., if I didn't go to another school."

"Of course you could."

"I just happen to love the place. It belongs to me much more than it ever did to Cecil. Cecil's just poised on a particular rung of his career. In a year or two he'll leave here and become a Bishop. After that, Godsell will see him precisely never. It will just be an item for his obituary notice. But that doesn't stop him from ruining the career of some one who's part of the School, always has been and always would be."

"There's not any question of your leaving the School, is there?" Maud asked in some alarm.

"Yes, there is, because I can't accept defeat. I've got to fight and it's bound to be a fight to the death. How can I possibly go on as a senior master when the Headmaster ignores my existence?"

"I admit it's difficult, darling."

"How can I accept being sacked as a Housemaster through a letter to my wife?"

"I'm sure he's bound to write to you personally."

The Headmaster did reach the point of taking a sheet from his box of headed writing-paper, soon after he had returned from his walk. To have sent for Edith would have involved openly taking advice from an inferior, which he could not do. He would have to write in his own hand. But there in his study, with the blank sheet before him, he could not for the life of him think how to begin. "Dear Rodney" would lead naturally to a kindly, paternal style of which he felt incapable in his mood of anger and revenge for the insult on the notice- board. The alternative was "Dear Webb" or "My dear Webb", of which the latter seemed to him slightly more chilly and distant. He actually wrote it and was studying the effect when George Medlicott knocked and came in. With a quick reflex action Dormer-Wills crumpled the sheet of paper into a ball, which he dropped into the wastepaper basket.

"Yes, George?" he asked.

"It's just that I happened to run into Jumbo Wilson. He told me, as he's apparently telling every one, that Rodney Webb is being moved from his House. I haven't spoken to Rodney yet. I telephoned, but he and Maud seem to be out, so I haven't any idea what the score is. I thought it might be a good idea if I were to drop in and have a word with you as soon as possible."

"Sit down, George," said the Headmaster.

His face looked naked and vulnerable, as if he had an idea that an attack was impending.

"What have you got to say to me?" he asked.

"Well, for a start, is it true?"

"Yes, it's true. I'm moving Rodney Webb. He's made too many mistakes of judgement, George. I have no confidence in him any more."

"And who is there to put in his place at such short notice?"

"I've had a word with Alec Meadows. I think he'll be the right man in the right place."

"One more question, Cecil. Is this decision irrevocable? I mean, has it gone beyond the stage where it can be stopped?"

"Yes, George. I've sent a personal letter and I've also communicated with the Bursar, as you know. In case you're thinking of questioning my decision, I should tell you that I'm fully supported by Sir William Nutting. We both feel that there has to be a stiffening of the moral fibre in that House. Alec may not be an intellectual, but he's a person with a lot of common sense and realism. I believe he can still pull things back in time and he needs to have as free a hand as possible. That's why I'm moving the Webbs into Carlton Close during the holidays. I want a clean break. When the boys come back, they'll find a *fait accompli*. There'll be no victimization, I assure you, but right from the first day of term I want a new pattern set under new leadership."

Cecil Dormer-Wills had spoken with great earnestness, overcoming in turn the arguments which he anticipated would be brought against him. He was surprised when Medlicott remained silent and pensive.

"What is it, George?" he asked after a few moments. "Do I fail to carry you with me?"

"It's not that. I didn't say anything because I was considering my position. I suppose I speak for the Staff more than any other master except perhaps Arthur Smith. My position is strong simply because I haven't got any ambition left. If I were going to be a Headmaster, I'd have been it five years ago."

"Yes, George? What are you trying to say?"

"Just that you're making a mistake. In my considered view you haven't got the power to remove Rodney."

"I'm the Headmaster, George."

"Yes, but you know as well as I do that the Headmaster of Godsell is a Constitutional Monarch. As long as he's content just to punctuate the discourse pronounced by the School, or which will be pronounced by the School, well and good. But if he steps out of line, if you'll forgive me for saying so, if he doesn't recognize that certain steps are *ultra vires* as far as he's concerned, he's asking for trouble."

"Exactly what trouble do you anticipate in this case, George?"

"I believe the Staff will rebel. Something like half of it, and the better half, will refuse to accept your action. You'll be landed with the embarrassing loyalty of Jumbo Wilson and some others whom I won't mention."

"You mean only the nonentities will support me? Is that it?"

"More or less, Cecil. Yes."

"What about Hubert Carpindale?"

"Fatty's very friendly with Rodney, and perhaps rather more so with myself."

"He's also my senior chaplain who's obliged to accept my direction."

"I'm afraid you're misjudging Fatty if you imagine he'd take direction over a matter of conscience."

Dormer-Wills began to bluster a little.

"I have the support," he said, "of the Governing Body, or at least of a key member of it. With the best will in the world, George, I'm unable to grow apprehensive about the prospect of a revolution among the Godsell Staff, especially during the Christmas holidays."

George Medlicott took account of the Headmaster's final, calculating words with a certain tightening of the lips. They were an example of what he liked least in his chief.

"I can only say that I believe you to be mistaken. The Godsell Staff is perhaps excessively conscientious in these matters. If it recognizes a threat to itself through one of its members, it's capable of returning even from the Engadine."

"Ah, you're thinking of Colin Rawlinson."

"Yes, him and others."

"Do I understand," asked Dormer-Wills, "that I'm likely to find you opposing me, yourself?"

Medlicott allowed himself a small smile.

"You know my speciality, Cecil. I try and maintain contact between the warring parties. But I esteem Rodney Webb, as you're aware. I don't think any the worse of him if his judgement is sometimes on the generous side. It's easy to exaggerate these cases at the time and imagine that the School itself is threatened. What matters most is the boys individually, not the School as an abstract entity, and it's to Rodney's credit that he realizes that. He knows that his young Picton is likely to run out all right if he's given half a chance."

Cecil Dormer-Wills had an agonizing desire to show Medlicott the insulting card from the notice-board, by way of clinching Picton's guilt, and his hand even moved towards the key of the drawer in which he had put it away. But with his strong directive sense he recognized that it would be a mistake to put in evidence any trace of prejudice at this moment.

"Webb himself now considers that he was mistaken," he reminded George Medlicott.

George did not argue the point but rose to his feet and stood looking down from a height on the small Headmaster. He said:

"Well, we shall see, shan't we?"

"Yes, indeed. Keep in touch, George. I'd like to know what the Staff feels."

"That's not as easy as it sounds," said George Medlicott as he prepared to leave the room. "The Godsell Staff is quite incapable of feeling collectively."

11

THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

GODFREY Norman arrived at Webb's before lunch, by previous arrangement, to collect his son Ralph. He had no inkling that anything was wrong in the House and was conscious of pride that his son was senior monitor, as he himself had been Head Scholar in his time. But any human emotion, such as pride, was in his case deeply hidden under a dry and austere manner. The thinness of his lips, the scantiness of his sandy hair and the rimless gleam of his spectacles added up to a total which was formidable, but rather inhuman. Even the car at the kerb, although a serviceable one, looked anonymous. Norman himself wore a mackintosh belted at the waist and he scuffed his brown walking-shoes against the step as he waited.

"Hullo, Rodney!" he said in an abrupt tone of voice as the Housemaster opened the door. "Is Ralph ready? Sorry to leave him with you so long."

"He's waiting for you, I think."

Rodney's slight sense of unease towards the established and successful caused him, as formerly with the Headmaster, to baulk at the Christian name.

"Everything all right? Good term?"

"Well, not awfully. Perhaps if you've got a moment you'll come into the study. I'll leave a word for Ralph to put his luggage in the car."

When he rejoined Godfrey Norman, Rodney said without beating about the bush:

"The fact is that I may have to leave my House. Webb's has been under fire from the Headmaster. Everything about it seems to be disapproved of, even including Ralph to some extent."

"Tell me more."

With some questioning Norman extracted the hard details of the story. Little explanation was needed because he already knew the system and the personalities.

"But Cecil's out of his mind," he commented. "He wrote to your wife and hasn't communicated with you?"

"Not yet he hasn't. I suppose he may still do so."

"It's a funny way to run a railway, isn't it?"

Godfrey Norman liked to use such phrases of antiquated and jocose slang, to which the proper reaction was a smile.

"It certainly is," Rodney agreed, smiling.

"Look. Would it help if I went and saw old Cecil now? It's just possible I might be able to get some sense out of him."

"Yes, of course. In that case would you like to stay to lunch? I'm sure Maud can manage something and Ralph can join us."

"Thanks, Rodney. Just give Cecil a ring, will you, and say I'm on my way round? Or tell the secretary, if you prefer. You needn't mention what it's about."

Rodney did his best to comply with this less embarrassing instruction, but failed to prevail against the efficiency of Edith Foster.

"What is the purpose of Mr. Norman's call?" she asked.

"I think he just wants to see the Headmaster."

"Just one moment, please, Mr. Webb."

Rodney waited for quite a long time, hearing incomprehensible sounds of a conversation on another line, before the secretary's voice returned to him.

"Are you still there, Mr. Webb?"

"Yes, indeed."

"I'm afraid it's not convenient just at present for the Headmaster to see Mr. Norman. He has to go out in about five minutes."

Rodney mouthed at Godfrey Norman, who looked at his watch and suggested the early afternoon.

"Could Mr. Norman see him early this afternoon?" Rodney asked into the telephone.

After a further longish interval for communication Edith Foster reported:

"I'm afraid the afternoon isn't any good either. The Headmaster's very sorry and he hopes Mr. Norman will write to him about whatever he had in mind."

Godfrey Norman mouthed, with the appropriate gestures, that he would like to talk to the Headmaster on the telephone.

"I don't think the Headmaster has time," was the answer. "He's just on his way out."

Rodney was acutely uncomfortable, for his companion had stretched out a hand in readiness to take the receiver. In his state of fluster he said:

"You realize that Mr. Norman is an important person?"

"Yes, we're quite aware of Mr. Norman's position," Edith Foster retorted, "and we'll look forward to receiving his letter."

A day or two ago she would not have dared to talk to him, a senior master, in such a tone. She was reflecting in an unmistakable way the rejection of him by Cecil Dormer-Wills and his present telephone call was being dismissed as a predictable manœuvre. He was pink about the face as he turned to Godfrey Norman.

"He won't speak to you. He says he's just going out and you should write, according to the secretary."

"Then he really is off his chump, poor chap."

"But he's still the Headmaster. So, personally, I don't see what we can do."

"Well, we can get a lobby together, for one thing," Godfrey Norman suggested. "If you've got any good chums on the Staff, whom Cecil's likely to listen to, the more the merrier."

"There's George Medlicott for one."

"Yes, that's the sort of chap. Headmaster calibre himself if he wasn't so easy-going. It might be useful to have a talk with him while I'm here."

"I can get him on the telephone."

The number was engaged, but it turned out that this was because George Medlicott was trying to telephone Rodney in order to report his interview with the Headmaster. It was quickly arranged that George and his wife Pauline should come to lunch. Maud was fetched to the telephone and agreed with Pauline on a pooling of provisions. It was deemed contrary to discipline that Ralph Norman, as a boy in the School, should be made privy to a plot against the Headmaster, so he was dispatched with five

shillings into the town to fend for himself. Then the Medlicotts arrived with their provisions. Maud and Pauline laid the table while the others talked on in the study.

"Suppose Cecil doesn't yield to pressure," Rodney Webb was asking, "what do we do?"

"Go to the Governing Body, I suggest," said Norman. "It's a pity I'm not on it myself. Let's see, who is?" He ticked off on his fingers. "Spooner. Nutting. Mayburn. What's that scientist fellow called?"

"Hancock. Giles Hancock."

"That's it. Hancock. Boddington. Levins. There are supposed to be seven, aren't there?'.

Rodney, who could only have mentioned about four, looked pensive, but George Medlicott supplied the name of Stephens.

"That's right. Oliver Stephens. Well, we'll have to get four of them on our side, that's all."

"Aren't they more or less bound to support the Headmaster?" Rodney asked.

"Not on your life. Boddington hates his guts. And poor old Levins is progressive, God help him. Kindness to homosexuals is his middle name, now that we've scrapped capital punishment. It's difficult to say about the others, except—Good Heavens!"

"What is it?"

"I'd forgotten Barstow. Richard Barstow, great-grand-nephew of the Founder. So there are eight. Yes, I remember now. William Nutting was kept on under some special arrangement, so that he could retire at sixty-five. After that the number will go back to seven."

Godfrey Norman was so pleased to have solved the problem of membership that he had momentarily lost sight of the object of the conversation.

"Where was I? Yes, we get together a lobby and if that doesn't change Cecil's mind, as I suspect it won't, we go to the Go-Bo."

Maud had come in during this last speech, to announce that lunch was ready.

"It's like the Cave of Adullam," she said.

"My dear lady, I know it comes in the Old Testament, but I can't for the life of me remember what happened in it."

"Ask Rodney," said Maud. "He teaches Divinity."

"Saul," said Rodney Webb, got annoyed with David for being more popular than he was and tried to do him in by throwing a lance at him while he was playing the harp."

"Yes, yes, it's coming back to me."

"So David went into hiding in the Cave of Adullam, among other places, and a band of about four hundred people gathered round him. Mind you, they were a poor lot, ill-used, in debt, with chips on their shoulders."

"And David spared Saul, didn't he?" asked Norman.

"Yes, but that was in another cave. He cut off the bottom of Saul's cloak, so as to show that he could have killed him if he'd wanted to."

"Should we spare Cecil, do you think?"

On this question they went into the haphazard lunch, which required much skill in sharing out since the more appetizing items, which were the Medlicotts', were in shorter supply than the Webbs'.

"What's the procedure," Rodney asked a little later, "for an appeal to the Governors?"

George Medlicott said: "I suppose you notify the Headmaster that you don't accept his ruling and request him to bring the matter to the Governors' attention."

"That sounds rather weak to me," the politician put in. "What I'd do is hire a good lawyer and leave it to him. It will cost something, mind you, but you want your case properly presented. We want some sort of psychiatric evidence, too. It's the usual thing in these homosexual cases, but that's a bridge we can cross when we come to it."

Rodney Webb told about his friend Dr. Haddow, at which Norman made vigorous sounds of approval.

"But fair's fair," he said. "We must put our case to Cecil first and give him the chance to reconsider. What I have in mind is a carefully chosen delegation. A few senior members of the Staff,

preferably from all three ladders, Classics, Modern and Science, an old Webbite or two and myself if you agree."

"I'm not so sure about the Old Webbites," put in Medlicott. "They won't be able to contribute anything and they'll put Cecil's back up."

"What about Cresswell?"

This was a solicitor and member of a political group which, although in the Opposition, shared some of the ideas of Godfrey Norman's friends.

"Cresswell's not a bad idea," Medlicott admitted reluctantly.

"I'll get hold of him if you two will look after the Staff. And I'll write to the Headmaster to arrange a formal interview. What sort of a date will suit you, Medlicott? We'd better leave Rodney out of this, or at least keep him in the background so that he can give evidence if it's needed."

The politician flipped over the pages of his diary until they were able to agree on January 3rd. An earlier date would clash with the Headmaster's invariable Christmas visit to his mother and step-father in Esher.

"Eleven AM suit you? We'll be in touch, then. I'll be at the farm, Rodney, in case you want me. You know me. I never let up on the job, even when I'm supposed to be on holiday."

He was already on the move, refusing Maud's coffee and satisfying himself that Ralph had returned safely from the town. The serviceable car shot off at speed, leaving Godsell to continue on its slower course.

"What amazed me," Rodney told the others, "was that he didn't seem upset about Cecil's fantastic rudeness."

"I imagine he regards it a challenge," said Medlicott. "Isn't that what politicians do?"

"He's a nice man," the attractive, blonde Pauline maintained, breaking a silence of nearly half an hour. "He seems rather hard and practical, but it's not for himself as much as others. There's no necessity for him to take up Rodney's case."

They returned to discussing the probable sympathies of members of the Staff. A printed list was produced which had been compiled in order of seniority and Rodney drew a line at the point

where influence with the Headmaster could be deemed to become negligible. The only exception was Dr. Spence, a young chemist who had made a strong impact in only five years at Godsell. George Medlicott undertook to speak to him, while Rodney and he would tackle Fatty Carpindale, who stood for the Classics as well as religion.

"I could take him on alone," Medlicott explained, "but I don't want to appear too active on your side. Otherwise I shall lose my status as a go-between."

He went on to describe his meeting with the Headmaster earlier in the day.

"I found him very awkward indeed," he summed up.

"As you expected. I remember your warning me, it seems ages ago. What's your view, George, about the chances of our deputation?"

"If you ask me, I don't think it will get much change out of Cecil. But it depends partly on how representative and high-level we can make it. If we could get Fatty and Colin and Arthur Smith and John Spence—"

"And yourself."

"Forget about me. But that lot might make some impression."

"Who's going to talk to Colin and Arthur?"

"I suggest you talk to them first. Both of them are bound to consult me, I imagine, and I'll come in as a sort of second barrel."

"It's most good of you, George."

"My dear fellow."

"To-morrow week being Christmas Day, when do you think I should start on my activities?"

"Earlier rather than later. As I told Cecil, our side will have to compete with the Engadine for Colin Rawlinson's soul."

"Are you sure Colin will be on our side?"

"Yes, pretty definitely. He'll be on the side of psychological treatment and I expect he'd have done the same himself, if he'd been in your shoes."

"Nailed boots, more like."

In appearance, Colin Rawlinson was a blond giant with blue eyes and rugged, oversize features. He was wearing an intricately

patterned sweater and corduroy trousers when Rodney Webb called on him.

"I expect you're off to Switzerland at any moment, aren't you?" Rodney asked, having accepted a chair in the study.

"Yes, as usual. Same boring round, I'm afraid."

"I'm sure it's nothing of the sort. I wish Maud and I were coming with you."

"Why don't you, Rodney? We'd like to have you."

Rodney did not pursue the subject. Colin Rawlinson was married to a rich wife who was inclined to be patronizing.

"As a matter of fact I'm in a spot of trouble," he began.

By now his story sounded second-hand, even in his own ears. He had to inject the values into it instead of allowing them to speak for themselves. Rawlinson sat in a small chair which looked inadequate to bear his weight, his arms dangling between his knees. Although his face was expressionless, and even looked stupid, Rodney Webb knew him well enough to realize that his stillness was a sign of meticulous attention. At one stage a Boxer dog butted its way through the door and came and slumped down against one of its master's legs, but the only gesture of recognition which Rawlinson made was to touch the animal's head with one of his hanging hands.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked at the end of the story.

"Lend your weight, which is considerable, to an appeal to the Headmaster."

"When is this appeal coming off?"

"We thought of January."

"And nobody else would do?"

"You're one of the heads of the Science Department. We want to make the delegation as representative as possible, but I fully realize it may be physically impossible for you to be here. I've just come to you on the off-chance."

"It's not physically impossible. I could fly back from Zurich, if it's worth the fare."

"I'd be prepared to pay, Colin."

Rawlinson waved this suggestion aside without even bothering to answer it. He was the only Godsell master who could have done so.

"One," he said, "I'm sure you acted sensibly and rightly over these boys. Two, I think Cecil, true to form, is beating the old obscurantist tribal gong. Three, I believe he has no call to treat you in the way he has done and it behoves us to stand up for you in the interests of the Staff as a whole. *Ergo*, the return fare from Zurich will be well spent, if I can contribute anything to the cause. As you know, I'm not the smooth, diplomatic type."

"All the same, I'd like to accept your kind offer."

Rawlinson made no attempt to prolong the conversation with small-talk, but led his guest to the door while the Boxer did its best to trip them both up. There was a quality of realism in the man which fascinated Rodney and which came out in the way in which he measured alcoholic drink in grammes or jobs in salary potential alone.

Arthur Smith was an altogether different proposition. As Chairman of the Godsellite Society he was the guardian of the innermost essence of the School. Meeting any Old Godsellite in the street, he was famous for his ability to pronounce, for instance: "You're Baker, A. W., Webb's, 1949–54." He was Editor of *The Godsellite* and of the roll of past and present members of the Society.

Alone among the Housemasters, he had defied the normal limitation of years of service and was in his twenty-first year as the incumbent of Smith's. He owed his barnacle-like tenure to a capacity for almost invariably being on or leading the winning side in any argument or dispute. His backing, as Rodney was aware, was more important than that of any other master. He fitted into no pigeon-hole as Rawlinson and Spence, as progressive scientists, did. Rather he had a senatorial capacity for assessment and decision in the interests of Godsell. The Headmaster would scarcely dare to overlook any judgement of his, expressive as it would be of so much thought and experience.

Arthur Smith was of middle height, slim, grey and spry in movement. He liked to dress in the manner of a country gentle-

man employing himself in the garden. His soft tweed jacket not only had elbows of leather, but insides to the forearms, cuffs and edgings to the lapels in leather. His trousers were of hard-wearing cord and his shoes, hand-made, dated from another generation. He had been Mayor of Godsell and carried himself with conscious dignity. His grey eyes seemed the windows of his judicious, well-ordered personality.

Rodney was more nervous than he had been with Colin Rawlinson, sitting among the debris of Smith's sporting, intellectual and civic trophies in a room cluttered with married children looking at him out of silver frames. He took pains to explain his motives in a way which would appeal to the man in the street rather than to some one committed or partisan, and stressed his concern with fairness to the boy offenders. When at last he stopped speaking he was disturbed by the length of the silence. Arthur Smith was tamping tobacco into a pipe which he had taken from the Saturday slot in a rack marked with the days of the week.

"Can I count on you, Arthur?" Rodney asked over-anxiously.

Smith lit his pipe and only then, in between wheezes and puffs, began to answer:

"Surely we have to distinguish between two questions here? On the one hand we have the question of powers and responsibilities as between the Headmaster and a Housemaster. On the other hand, there's the way in which the Headmaster has actually treated you. Let's deal with that first, for the sake of simplicity, shall we? Obviously he ought to give you written notice to quit your House and if he wants you to remain on the Staff he has to provide you with adequate alternative accommodation through the good offices of the Bursar. You tell me he's putting you into old Treadgold's house, which is fair enough, but he hasn't given you the notice. That's most unlike Cecil Dormer-Wills and I have no doubt it's an oversight, which can be repaired without any difficulty. I believe I could put the matter to him in a tactful manner myself. Certainly it's inadequate—I agree with you there—simply to send a personal letter to Maud. Also I sympathize with you about the manner in which Cecil evidently spoke to

you. It's a fault in him to be very harsh and abrupt on occasion. At the same time his manner or manners are surely irrelevant to the main issue."

"How do you look on that, Arthur?"

"It'll be no surprise to you, Rodney, if I tell you that I don't like perverts. If I ever find them in my House, and I don't often do so, I kick 'em out and there's an end of the matter."

"You kick them out yourself? In other words you exercise your own discretion?"

Arthur Smith waved his pipe in mild expostulation.

"Half a mo', Rodney. You're going too quick for me. When I say I kick 'em out, I mean I march them up to the Headmaster double quick and indicate to him in no uncertain terms that I'd like to see the back of them. I may say I've always found him most co-operative.

"Now, if you ask me why I don't deal with these cases myself, as I'm more than capable of doing because I know my own mind, it's because the Headmaster's a little bit legalistic. Old Adrian Massingbird, as you know, made out a list of the offences which had to be referred to his jurisdiction. That procedure was specifically confirmed by Cecil Dormer-Wills on his assuming office and I have reason to know that he's very touchy about it. I once had words with him over a matter of blasphemy in the dormitory."

"Haven't we grown out of that sort of attitude?" asked Rodney.

"Oh, we're old-fashioned, I dare say, but it's no bad thing to go by the Law and the Prophets. Cecil and I see eye to eye there."

"Most Housemasters deal with homosexual offences themselves, or at least several do."

"But in that case they're at fault and worthy of rebuke, Rodney, don't you agree?"

Rodney Webb felt himself trapped by the powerful conformism of his senior colleague. To declare his views openly would be to forfeit even the measure of personal sympathy which he had earned by his story.

"I'm sure Housemasters must have a discretionary power," he said.

"Oh, but they have, provided always that they operate within the framework of the rules."

"You're telling me, aren't you, Arthur, that you can't support me against the Headmaster?"

Arthur Smith sucked at his pipe.

"I accept that formulation," he said after a pause. "I'd always be reluctant to support anybody against the Headmaster. He's the ruler of our Society and if we oppose him in a serious matter we're threatening ourselves with division and anarchy."

"But suppose the Headmaster acts wrongly?"

"We can tactfully suggest, Rodney, as I propose to do over your notice."

"Isn't that what the delegation's intended for? To tactfully suggest, if you don't mind the split infinitive?"

"As I understand, it intends to go much further than suggestion. It proposes to threaten an appeal to the Governing Body, backed by legal opinion, unless the Headmaster gives way."

"The alternative is that I give way, even though I'm in the right as I believe."

"Yes, but Godsell's a lot more important than you and I, Rodney. Whatever we do, we mustn't put Godsell in the sort of mortal danger which you're contemplating."

"Surely that's an exaggeration?"

"I don't believe so and I speak with some experience."

"Do you think," Rodney asked, "that your friend H.B. is likely to take the same line as yourself?"

H.B. Ellice, the Master in College, eclipsed even Arthur Smith in length of service. Rodney accorded him deference as a gesture to Smith's feelings, although Ellice's senility was a standing joke in the School.

"Obviously I can't speak for H.B., but we often see eye to eye on these occasions."

Rodney Webb stood up and looked down with some frustration, as well as affection, at his colleague. He could envisage the consequences of approaching the Headmaster with a delegation of progressives only, as now seemed a probability.

"Thank you for speaking so frankly, Arthur, at any rate."

"Not at all. Personally, of course, you can count on Daisy and myself if you and Maud need anything."

Rodney Webb returned home to find a message to the effect that Nigel Cresswell was interested in his case and would find the opportunity to pay a call during the next few days. He telephoned George Medlicott to pass on this news and also to report on the discussion with Arthur Smith. It appeared that Dr. Spence was enthusiastic about joining the delegation, as Colin Rawlinson had been.

"We need some ballast," said George.

"Yes, but who is there?"

"Only Fatty Carpindale, I fear."

12

FATTY ON THE SCALES

THE result of Arthur Smith's tactful intervention with the Headmaster was a neatly typed note signed by Edith Foster. It read:

"Dear Mr. Webb,

"I am asked by the Headmaster to make clear to you the decision at which he has reluctantly arrived. He feels that the time has come for you to leave your House and he proposes filling your place from the beginning of next term. He has accordingly asked the Bursar to make No. 10, Carlton Close, available to you as quickly as possible, so that you and Mrs. Webb can make the move in good time.

"Although these rearrangements will come as no surprise to you, since they were communicated to Mrs. Webb at her request, the Headmaster regards it as desirable that they should be put formally on record to yourself personally. He asks me to confirm that your teaching duties will remain unaffected for the time being."

This note was used as Exhibit A in the joint approach made by Rodney Webb and George Medlicott to Fatty Carpindale, the senior chaplain. Fatty read it through three times and then said:

"I'm astonished. You see, it's signed by Edith and the syntax has something a little bit secretarial about it, too. And not a word of thanks, after how many years, Rodney?"

"Fifteen and a bit in the House."

"Fifteen years. It's deplorable."

Juliet Carpindale came in with a tray of tea and cups, which she handed round.

"And the Elvas plums, darling," said her father. "Rodney and George will have an Elvas plum apiece, I'm sure, if they're pressed."

"I'm glad you feel as we do," said George Medlicott when the fifteen-year-old girl had gone out of the room.

"Oh, I do, George, but how pleasant it would be if we could forget all about it. I mean just for Christmas. We could agree to become efficient and practical again on Boxing Day. Isn't that quite an idea?"

He popped an Elvas plum in his own mouth and licked his fingers. He was a fat man in a sad world, consoling himself with goodies. "How greedy one is!" was his repeated exclamation.

"We can't afford the time, Fatty. The new term begins on January 18th, so we have to go into action as soon as the holiday's over. We're thinking about a delegation to Cecil on January 3rd."

"I don't think I'd care to join a delegation. You see, it would make the Headmaster feel so ashamed. He's the Ordinary of Godsell. That means he's my moral chief. He has to pretend to be superior to me and I expect he usually is. But it would be dreadful for him to have to sit there while I pointed an accusing finger at him. It would spoil our little game that we've played for so many years, like children in a garden. That's why I want to pretend this has never happened."

"You're being an escapist, Fatty."

"Yes, well, I think escapists jolly well deserve medals."

"It's a bit tough on Rodney."

"*I* don't matter particularly," Rodney Webb put in.

His modesty, however spurious, made its effect on the sensitive Fatty, who said at once:

"Poor Rodney, we mustn't abandon you to your fate. But it's all so difficult. Juliet, for one, will never forgive me if I fall out with Cecil. They have a Great Romance together, you know. They read poetry to each other by the hour."

This was a kind of remark which Fatty Carpindale enjoyed making. It was a double bluff: pretending to be ingenuous while he was really being sly. He enjoyed the cautious and tactful expressions which appeared on his friends' faces.

"All I want," he went on, "is my *aurea mediocritas*, but to enjoy it I have to remain on good terms with Cæsar Augustus. I can't

afford to join any delegation of malcontents. I really can't. You've quite spoilt my Christmas already, you two."

"We don't expect an immediate decision, Fatty. We'll give you time to think about it."

"That makes it all the more diabolical. You're locking me up with my conscience and I know I shall get the worst of it."

"But there's a reward. We intend to take you out to lunch tomorrow. Juliet too, if you like."

"Oh, where to?"

"We thought of the Ladycross Inn."

George Medlicott had judged the point of temptation shrewdly, for Fatty had no car and needed assistance to make the twelve-mile gastronomic pilgrimage. Parental responsibility might have caused him to hesitate, but even that was looked after in the "Juliet too".

"It's bribery," he protested. "I shall accept your invitation and then refuse to join your delegation, I warn you."

"Never mind. We want you anyway, Fatty."

Fatty Carpindale was content. He liked nothing better than an expedition with fellow-masters or boys, and mercifully his Juliet could still be counted as a boy. Ladies, although they were deserving of infinite reverence, somehow spoiled such an occasion with their ceremonious materialism and the restraint which they imposed on the little naughtinesses of conversation. He could remember hardly a single mixed lunch- or dinner-party where the talk had been anything to write home about, when his wife was alive. Not that he would ever be guilty of disloyalty to her, who was an angel in Heaven.

"Will he help us, do you think?" Rodney asked when he and George Medlicott had left Fatty's house and were standing on the pavement.

"I don't know. It's impossible to tell with Fatty. In spite of his affected manner, he's one of the few people who really take their friends seriously."

"By the way, I insist on paying for this lunch."

"So do I, because I issued the invitation."

"Then we'll share it."

In the bar of the Ladycross Inn, the next day, a fire of wood logs was burning and there was comfort in looking out of the window at the fields gripped by winter frost. Menus two feet wide and two feet deep were handed to them by a waiter.

"We shall all wait while Juliet decides," said Fatty.

It was a long wait, because Juliet read through every word of blue and red ornamental handwriting.

"Tomato soup, cheese omelette and cold milk," she ordered.

"Let us hymn the excruciating taste of the young, which endureth for ever. I shall have fish pâté with hot toast and butter and pheasant with all the trimmings and Stilton cheese."

"Oh, Daddy!"

George Medlicott asked: "Burgundy, and a glass of white wine first?"

"Please, George."

The other orders were given and the waiter went away to set the feast in motion.

"I give you due warning," said Fatty Carpindale. "I'm not going to be seduced by all this. You're wasting your money and your time unless, that is, you just enjoy our company. Juliet and I can't be bought by costly viands, can we, darling?"

"No, Daddy!"

"We were going to wait," said Rodney, "until the brandy and then sweep you off your feet."

"I shall remain sober. As sober as a senior chaplain. And then I can go on being the senior chaplain and Juliet can go on having her Great Romance."

"What sort of poetry does the Headmaster like?" asked Rodney curiously.

"*The Hunting of the Snark* is his favourite," said Juliet, "and he likes Tennyson, too. He thinks poetry's all gone to pot nowadays. He says he likes it to be beautiful or funny, but not ugly."

They all gazed at the ordinary-looking girl, who could give them such an accurate picture of the tastes of their ruler.

"You see, he's quite human," Fatty commented. "That's what makes it so difficult to take sides and so unkind of you to try and persuade me. I really think I shall stay out of your delegation."

Over the pheasant he said: "This lunch really is delicious and the Burgundy is a dream. I don't know how I shall find the will-power to resist your blandishments."

When the brandy came, he said: "This is the moment of attack, isn't it? What the war-time newspapers used to call H-hour. So I'll tell you what really upsets me in your plan. It's the thought of just being a naughty boy in the background, while some one else whom I may abominate does all the talking. Please don't think I mind being in the background, because I don't at all, but I like being a good boy in the background and not a naughty boy. I can't bear the thought of Cecil looking at me and imagining I agree with whatever bosh is being talked by our spokesman. After all, from what you say he may be a politician or a scientist or anything. He's almost bound to be what's mistakenly known as a progressive and I'm almost bound to disagree with what he says."

Rodney and George Medlicott exchanged a glance of complicity. Then George proposed:

"Why don't you act as the spokesman yourself, Fatty? We don't want a progressive, if only because a progressive's not likely to cut much ice with Cecil. We'd much rather have you. You'll be the most senior member of our party from inside the School, anyway."

"Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Why don't you, Fatty?" asked Rodney, lending his voice to the movement of persuasion.

Even Juliet put in: "It's no worse than preparing a new sermon, Daddy."

Fatty Carpindale, his face moist and glowing from the pleasures of the meal, drained his coffee cup and held it out for Juliet to pour in more.

"Humbly," he said, "my dear friends, I accept. I can no other."

When they left him at his door, it was noticeable how Juliet cleverly manœuvred the large, slightly unsteady man indoors. He disappeared with a smile and a wave of the hand.

"It would be difficult for an outsider to grasp the truth about Fatty," George Medlicott pointed out. "On the surface we succeeded in our purpose of seducing him with a rich lunch at a cost of slightly less than a tenner, but we both know that isn't the

point at all. Fatty was always certain to help you, as soon as he knew you were in trouble. He just wanted a sacramental meal, if that isn't a blasphemous expression, and a gesture of commitment."

"He'll be eloquent, too," Rodney said reflectively, "if only he gets the details right."

There were now six suggested members of the delegation—Fatty, George Medlicott, Rawlinson, Spence, Cresswell and Godfrey Norman—and it was agreed between the friends that this was enough, representing as it did all three ladders at top level, the old Webbites and informed circles in public life.

It remained to convince Godfrey Norman by telephone that Fatty was indeed the right man to put the case on behalf of them all.

Adroitly concealing any ambitions of his own, the politician mentioned: "I'd thought of Nigel Cresswell, as a professional lawyer."

"But is that what we require at this stage? Surely it's better to have a spokesman from inside the School, who has all the possible credentials."

"Perhaps you're right. We can always stiffen him up if necessary."

"You were going to write to the Headmaster," Rodney mentioned.

"Yes, well, if Carpindale's going to speak for the delegation he'd better write for it, too, hadn't he? Use my name, of course."

"Thank you. I'll tell him."

Fatty insisted on collaboration over the drafting of the letter and in fact George Medlicott was responsible for most of the text. It read:

"Dear Headmaster and Ordinary,

"A number of us on the Staff, and also certain Old Godsellites, are concerned at the news that Rodney Webb is to be moved from his House. We would welcome the opportunity of visiting you and laying our views before you in the hope that you may be willing to reconsider your decision. As it is known

to us that you will be absent over the holiday, we suggest 11 AM on Tuesday, January 3rd as a suitable time for our call. It goes without saying that we can alter this at your convenience.

"It is not proposed that Rodney Webb himself should be among us, since the initiative comes from ourselves rather than from him. He is, however, fully informed of our intentions.

"Yours sincerely—"

There followed Fatty's signature on behalf of the six names. Rather than take any chances over missing the Headmaster, Fatty himself handed the letter to the manservant Bellows at the door.

Once a dangerous course of action has been entered upon, it is at least gratifying to be conscious of its effect. But in this case Fatty Carpindale's letter disappeared without a ripple of response. A day or two after its delivery he met Edith Foster in the street and confirmed with her that it had duly reached the Headmaster, who had set out soon afterwards for Esher.

"He'll see us, of course," said Fatty nervously.

"I really have no idea what he has in mind, Mr. Carpindale."

This was an understatement, for Edith Foster knew better than any other human being what Dormer-Wills had in mind. Whatever it was, however, she was not passing it on. Fatty had to accept the sort of rebuff which is hardest to endure: that from an underling who is fortified by the attitude of an employer. He reported back to Rodney Webb, who telephoned to Godfrey Norman at his farm. Once again Norman showed himself surprisingly calm in face of an affront. He simply remarked that "old Cecil" would not escape by taking cover.

Nigel Cresswell, the lawyer, came to call at Webb's House in order to inform himself about the case even though he was not now required to speak to the brief. He was a tall, prematurely grey-haired man whom Rodney Webb remembered as an unpopular intellectual boy.

"Dormer-Wills," he said, "came after my time. Is he a pæderast himself by any chance?"

"I have no reason to think so."

"Except that he's unmarried and a schoolmaster, with a strong-minded mother in the background. In the old days we'd have said that he sublimated the sex urge in his work, but nowadays we know better, don't we?"

"I think sublimation is commoner in our profession than some others."

"Schoolmasters are a race apart, are they?"

Cresswell's tone was mocking, but friendly.

"Not exactly," Rodney answered, taking him seriously, "but they lead disciplined lives on small incomes and they're constantly on parade. They have very little opportunity for the sort of vices that are always being attributed to them."

"I was really trying to get at Dormer-Wills's psychology. Is he so down on homosexuality because of an unadmitted weakness in himself?"

"George Medlicott and I think so, but he doesn't show any visible sign. As a matter of fact he seems to be rather keen on our colleague Carpindale's young daughter. Sort of a Lewis Carroll relationship, you know."

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" observed the lawyer, making the other feel sorry he had mentioned the matter.

"Dormer-Wills is an exceedingly well-controlled person," Rodney maintained. "It may be amusing to imagine him in some unseemly situation, but it's not very realistic."

"All the same, it's useful to know his Achilles' heel. The information may come in handy one of these days."

The Christmas holiday was passed in suspense, although this was mitigated by turkey at the Medlicotts' and a musical evening with Fatty Carpindale. All the members of the delegation were ready for their task. Colin Rawlinson, instead of going and coming back, had postponed his departure for Switzerland until the night of January 3rd.

On the previous day the Headmaster came back from Esher and sent for Fatty to his study. He had the unanswered letter on the desk in front of him.

"I regard this as an irrelevance," he said at once, holding it up for inspection. "I propose to take no notice whatever of it. The

power to appoint and dismiss Housemasters belongs to me and nobody else."

"There's a right of appeal, Cecil."

"To the Governing Body, yes. But I happen to know my Governors are behind me."

"There hasn't been a meeting, has there?"

"I've had private meetings. I know where I stand."

Fatty calculated that the Headmaster was likely to have seen those Governors who lived in or around London: Spooner, Mayburn and Stephens. Sir William Nutting was in any case safely in hand.

"Did you see Tony Mayburn?" he asked shrewdly.

"I have no need to disclose who I saw and who I didn't see."

"No, of course not. I was just thinking it would be unlike a legal man to commit himself without further inquiry."

"As a matter of fact," Dormer-Wills admitted, "Mayburn was somewhat less positive than the others. He'd be bound to be in his position."

"Yes, that was just my meaning. But my argument, Cecil, is that you can't want the matter to go to the Governors, however they may ultimately decide. And you can't afford to alienate a man like Godfrey Norman."

"I abominate Godfrey Norman. I like neither the man nor his opinions. In my view he's a cheap journalist who's wormed his way into politics. I decline to be held accountable to him for my decisions in any manner whatsoever."

"I see your point, Cecil," Fatty Carpindale conceded, registering that Godfrey Norman's participation was evidently what had caused the lack of answer to his letter.

"I'm not at all pleased at your being involved in this, Hubert," the Headmaster went on. He considered the otherwise universal nickname of "Fatty" to be undignified for a clergyman to bear. "According to our constitution, you owe me a special kind of loyalty."

"My loyalty makes me want you to do right, Cecil. I believe you're being unfair to Rodney Webb and so do other good judges.

You've got to see us, Cecil. You can't afford to alienate such an important group in and outside the School."

"I'm afraid threats will carry no weight with me. I should have thought you'd have realized that. I refuse to meet your delegation."

"We've been waiting patiently for you to return from holiday. Colin Rawlinson's even put off his journey to the Engadine."

"Then the sooner he puts it on again, the better."

Fatty Carpindale had been confident of success with the Headmaster. His mixture of earnestness and charm, which could be varied now one way and now the other, hardly ever failed to win the day. But now, with a sense of desperation since his friends had committed themselves into his hands, he recognized that he was pushing against a stone wall. There was a determination in the Headmaster's words, and still more his set expression, which seemed close to monomania. Fatty turned away to the window and saw that flakes of snow were drifting down and settling on the grass. Barstow Hall was almost invisible beyond the white flurry.

"It's snowing, Cecil."

"Yes, so I see."

"What fun it will be for Juliet. I must get out her sledge. I expect she'll want to go up on to White Horse Down as she did last year." He turned round to face the silent Headmaster. "You may be dividing Godsell against itself, Cecil. Dividing the Common Room into the sheep and the goats. I don't want to see that happen if it can be avoided."

"At least you've made it clear which side you'll be on, Hubert."

"Have I? Perhaps I have. Until now I've thought of myself as holding the scales," said Fatty.

13

ON HOLIDAY

SYLVIA had asked: "Do you live in a castle, then?"

Frank Pooley had to explain that it was the small town or village which took the name of Castle from the impressive ruin above it. He hardly liked to add that the house which was their address was not entirely occupied by the Pooleys. The grander part of the stone building, the front lawn and shrubbery and the swimming-pool were enjoyed by a Mr. Barfield, whom the Pooleys called among themselves "Barfly". But Barfly, according to Frank's father, was in trouble. Bad debts were forcing him to wind up his business, which was concerned with supplying film companies. He had not even been seen for a month and Reginald Pooley was nerving himself to raise the matter of unpaid rent when he did put in an appearance. In his rather premature retirement, the elder Pooley could not afford to overlook such a comparatively large source of income.

But economic realities were blurred under the snow when Frank, having met Sylvia at the station, walked up-hill with her to the house. From the rise of the drive, looking back over the town, it was possible to see the sea, which appeared almost black against the white curve of the shore.

Frank went ahead, barging with Sylvia's suitcase through the side door which the Pooleys used as a front one. His father was mending a shelf which had collapsed with a crash during breakfast.

"Dad, this is Sylvia."

"Oh, yes. How d'you do? You'd better show Sylvia to her room, hadn't you, Frank?"

"Yes, of course."

In the bedroom, which was small but pretty with a sloping ceiling and oak beams, Sylvia asked:

"Is your mother out?"

"Yes, she's taken the car across the ferry to do the week's shopping."

From downstairs came the tapping of the elder Pooley's hammer. Frank was eager to make advances to Sylvia. For a week his imagination had been creating images of erotic abandon. But she, he soon discovered, was more concerned about the social problems of her stay, such as whether she should change before meeting his mother. She kissed him quickly and efficiently, but resisted the suggestion that she should come to his room and listen to the gramophone. There was plenty of time for that, she said, which at least sounded promising.

Frank's sister Mary-Anne had gone in the car with his mother and on her return she talked a lot to the visitor. As for Mrs. Pooley, it was predictable that she would describe Sylvia as "a little nobody", but on the surface she was moderately pleasant to her. Reginald Pooley, his shelf-mending once done, was pleased to have an attentive listener and described the method of laying stone tiles in the village. Thus Sylvia, to Frank's disappointment, began to be absorbed into the life of the family instead of ministering to his private delight.

In reaction, after lunch he suggested a walk to the cove where the family always bathed in summer. Mary-Anne was keen to come as well, but he warned her off with a few whispered brotherly words. Outside the house he put on some woollen gloves which his mother had knitted for him. Sylvia looked at them with disapproval.

"What's the matter with them?" he asked.

"It's soft, wearing those things. You want to wear proper gloves."

She would not start until he had found another pair. It was clear to him that she regarded him as something of a mummy's boy, compared for instance with Gavin McBain. To restore his wilting prestige, Frank rolled a snowball from the front lawn and tried to cram it down her neck. She ran from him and burst through a thin screen of shrubs. There was a wooden hut, facing away from the main house and towards Barfly's swimming-pool.

"What's that?" Sylvia asked.

"Oh, it's a sort of bar and summer-house. It goes with the pool."

He did not reveal that it belonged to some one else, being sensitive about the family's occupation of the back part of the house.

"Can we get in?"

"Yes, rather. I know where the key is. I'll get it if you like."

"Not now, silly. We're going for a walk, aren't we?"

"Yes, of course."

They followed the road down between the stone houses with the snow lying a foot thick on their roofs.

"What a funny old-fashioned place. Have you always lived here?" Sylvia asked.

"No. My father used to be in the Colonial Service, but of course there's nothing much left of it now. He ended up as an Acting Governor. He could have gone into something else if he'd wanted to. I suppose he was keen on retirement."

"Doesn't he do anything?"

"Only local work. He's on the Council and that sort of thing."

At the bottom of the village a path led along a valley which dipped towards the sea. In such a remote country-side there should have been a lovely and exclusive beach, but in fact there was only a pool with one or two oil-drums lying on their sides in it and beyond, over a hump of snowy shingle, the melancholy and regular pounding of the waves.

"This is where we bathe," Frank said.

"I think I prefer the pool."

"You mean that summer-house. I'll get the key after tea."

"As long as your mother doesn't know what we're up to."

"Don't worry. She never goes there."

By tea-time Frank Pooley's school report had arrived. It was all good except for the Headmaster's comment on a separate sheet at the end: "He has been in bad company and will need to turn over a new leaf."

"What company does he mean, Frank?" asked Mrs. Pooley.

"Oh, probably Gavin McBain. He was expelled on the last day of term. Something to do with going out with girls."

"Was it anything to do with you, Frank?"

Frank met Sylvia's cool glance across the table.

"Up to a point it was," he admitted.

"Then why weren't you expelled?"

"I suppose I was lucky, or cunning, or both."

"Oh, Frank!"

Mrs. Pooley sounded grieved. Any sign of awakening virility in her son seemed to her a betrayal of the standards which she was always trying to implant.

"It was taking a risk, Frank," Sylvia said afterwards. "She could easily have put two and two together."

"I don't care if she does. It's always my policy to tell her a bit more than the actual truth. Then she can't get indignant about what she *does* find out."

Tony Picton, in the comfortable house on the river at Maidenhead, could afford to be more sophisticated with his mother.

"Let's face it," he told her. "Phil's got no particular talent for conversation. His views aren't outstanding for their originality. He's simply rather an attractive boy."

"Is he worth sacrificing your school career for? Or is it time to get rid of him?"

"The question doesn't arise, Mother. One never makes these grand, sweeping decisions. One just succumbs to an itch and probably wishes one hadn't, but by then it's too late."

"That's what Mr. Webb says in your report, that you ought to try and 'overcome your weaknesses'."

"Yes, and the Headmaster would like to flog them out of me. Neither of them can see that I'm just what I am. They want to justify their wretched systems, whether they're liberals like Rodney Webb or fundamentalists like old Dormer-Wills."

"I don't want to prove any system, Tony. I want you to be happy, if that's possible."

Tony Picton, on his feet, hesitated in front of her as if a retort were on the tip of his tongue. She was propped up on her cushions, watching him calmly over the top of her horn-rimmed spectacles with the wreckage of the tea before her.

"So long, darling boy."

He knew that as soon as he was out of the room she would turn back to her book, a new novel, and dismiss him for the time being from her mind. She would not worry herself over his dilemma. It

was enough for her that she allowed him the freedom to make his own decisions; that at the most she made him face a pertinent question like the one about his school career.

Yet he could feel a need in his soul for positive direction. Life at Godsell might chafe him with its restrictions. It was still more tolerable than the vacuum of his mother's rule, or unrule. He considered going to look for Philip but dismissed the idea after a moment's thought. The prospect which had seemed so enticing in the library at Webb's now bored him. He went to his room and threw himself on the bed.

At the same time Frank Pooley was removing the key of the summer-house from the place where it was usually kept, the ledge under the window in Barfly's garage. It refused to move in the lock when he inserted it. He had to use his strength to overcome the resistance and a rusty creak resounded through the garden. He did not dare to turn on the electric light for fear that a stray beam or chink of light would be seen. A hand-torch, which he had borrowed with the key from the garage, illuminated with its thin beam a settee, two modern chairs and a cocktail cabinet.

"Hurray! Let's have a drink," Sylvia said at once.

It was too late to retreat from the fiction that everything belonged to the Pooley family.

"Why not?" Frank asked with a spurious gaiety.

He picked up the available bottles one at a time and examined their levels, which the torch-light revealed as depressingly low. Finally he poured out two glasses of so-called "walnut sherry". He had hopes of replacing a similar quantity from his father's Amontillado.

Sylvia was wearing the outfit which she had improvised for elegant evening wear in the country: a red sweater, skin-tight white trousers and white ankle-boots Holding her sherry, she sank down upon the settee. One of the wooden feet immediately broke off, so that she was tilted at an angle and spilt some of her sherry on to the floor.

"It's lovely here in the summer," Frank assured her.

It was agonizingly difficult to recover the intimacy which they had achieved on White Horse Down. Part of the reason was that

Gavin McBain was far away in the North and unable to provoke emulation. But a process was also at work which had first been noticeable to him when Sylvia was mending his trousers in her parents' house. She was constantly humanizing their relationship and frustrating the fantasies which he was naturally inclined to and which the atmosphere of Godsell encouraged. It would have been easy, according to the School convention, to write her off as "a frigid little virgin", but the description matched neither his experience nor McBain's specification. She seemed to regard sex as a factor in a person's behaviour, which should be taken sensibly and as a matter of course. Over-enthusiasm was a cause for suspicion and criticism in her view.

"Have you had many boy-friends?" he asked.

"I don't go with every one who comes along, if that's what you mean."

"How many have you been with?"

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies."

He stroked her hair with a restrained tenderness until at last she put down her glass of sherry, which she had been sipping with enjoyment in spite of its mustiness, and turned to him with the practised movement characteristic of her in her yielding moods.

"I can take these off if you like," she suggested, "only it's so cold."

She arched her back while the settee rocked dangerously under them. A gust of wind dashed the branches of a shrub against the window, as if bony fingers were rapping on the glass.

"What's that?"

"Nothing, darling."

"Lock the door. We don't want anyone to come in."

Frank found the key and turned it in the screeching lock. Even if a boast to Gavin McBain suggested itself, his real sensation was one of terror at the sight of her white legs moving in the half-darkness. It was a terror from which he escaped by approaching and submerging himself in it.

"You're trembling," Sylvia said.

"It's the cold," he lied with chattering teeth.

But slowly in her arms he entered the delectable day-dream to which she had admitted him on White Horse Down. There was no interruption by an angry farmer. He could venture closer and closer to the limit of pleasure without ever crossing it. Now and again he made a move towards actual possession, which Sylvia evaded, and this provoked in him a drowsy resentment.

"Why can't I?"

"Sh'sh!"

"Why should I sh'sh?"

"Because I say."

Only gradually, as the holiday continued, did he discover the terms for an advance in intimacy. They were never exactly formulated, but given to be understood by half-statements and implications. Mrs. Pooley was under the impression that marriage or engagement was the price and attempted to warn Frank:

"Don't you think you'll find yourself having to do the right thing by her?"

"Honestly, Mummy, how crude can you get!"

"Well, you go off for hours at a time with her and Daddy says you've been in Barfly's summer-house, which he's rather cross about."

"I thought Barfly had defaulted on the rent."

"He may pay up, Daddy still thinks."

"Anyway, Sylvia knows as well as you do that I'm still at school and an engagement simply isn't on. You're miles wide of the mark, Mummy, honestly you are."

"Explain to me, then, if I'm so stupid."

"Sylvia wants some one steady, who she can rely on, even if it's only for a year or so."

"But you could have such fun, just when you're growing up. All the girls would be mad about you, as they were about Reggie when I first met him. Why do you have to tie yourself to a little nobody?"

All of Mildred Pooley's opinions were coloured by social bias. She herself, imposing in appearance, was made up for a part which her country audience was incapable of appreciating. Her conversation was scattered with names designed to impress but in

course of time grown meaningless. The conception which she had of "fun" was particularly remote and even chilling, being unwarmed by any gleam of sensuality. Rather it evoked a stiff ceremonial, evening dress and tedious entertainments. Frank's actual world was continually being criticized in relation to her vanished one. His friends were "funny little friends" and a girl of his choice was denied any valid identity.

"I like Sylvia. I like being with Sylvia," he maintained. "Sylvia *is* my fun."

"Yes, but that sort of fun often leads to trouble and I'd like to know what happens then."

Frank looked pained.

"Just because people are together on holiday, and enjoy each other's company, it doesn't necessarily involve their having a baby."

By such ingenuous phrases he liked to tempt her into prurience. Then he would privately compare her to her disadvantage with Sylvia, who could express herself about sex in candid but blameless commonplaces. Even Mary-Anne, when she joined in their conversations, was visibly more inhibited. Sylvia's good fortune lay in the nice balance which she was able to strike. She was eager for adventure but also cautious about promiscuity. Frank suspected that she was capable of physical kindness to a steady and trusted companion. For this rewarding part he was content to try and qualify.

14

THE APPEAL

"I AM writing to give you notice that I do not accept your decision to deprive me of my Housemastership. I submit that this decision has been reached without good reason, that it was not communicated to me in a proper fashion and that I was given inadequate notice of the change in my position. I am supported in my attitude by senior members of the Staff who, together with certain Old Godsellites, have been refused an opportunity of putting their case to you in person.

"In these circumstances I feel justified in exercising my right of appeal to the Governing Body and I must ask you to forward this letter for their consideration. I am being advised by Mr. Nigel Cresswell, who seeks a hearing of the case during the holiday period. In the mean time I propose remaining in my House and am informing the Bursar accordingly."

The explosive communication was composed by Cresswell and Rodney Webb during an argumentative session in the study. Rodney was keen to soften a phrase here and there and add a paragraph on his loyalty to Godsell. But Cresswell, whose easy-going elegance was only superficial, took a strong line with him.

"Half-measures would be fatal at this stage," he said. "Whether you like it or not, you're committed to a duel which you have to win."

"Surely we could add that I'll loyally accept the decision of the Governing Body, whatever it is."

"What's the point? You won't have any option, anyway."

"It doesn't sound like me, somehow, this letter."

Rodney was revisited by the sense of impending disaster which he had felt at the encounter with the Headmaster in the playing-fields, when he first failed to inform him about Tony Picton. In the upshot he had been deprived of his House. This action, the appeal to the Governing Body, threatened to be more crucial. It might be irretrievable and mean the end of his career at Godsell. Yet he

stood by, watching impotently from the door-step, while the letter was committed by the lawyer to the pillar-box on the corner.

"What will he do?" Rodney asked when the other returned.

"Who? Dormer-Wills? He'll do as we say. He may have ignored an unconstitutional approach but he'll respect your right of appeal, I imagine."

There was no Edith Foster to slit the envelope with her paper-knife and lay the letter respectfully in the Headmaster's in-tray. At this midway point of the holiday even Bellows was off duty. Cecil Dormer-Wills had to take the letter out of the box and open it himself. The tone in which it was written gave him a jolt, because of its insolence, almost like physical pain. He re-read it several times in his study and in a few minutes was ready for action, but he was at a disadvantage without bells and servants and willing helpers. It was necessary to adapt the method to the possibilities open to some one who could neither type nor photo-copy. Extracting a few sheets from a box of headed writing-paper, he wrote:

"Dear Warden,

"I know very well that the next meeting of the Governing Body is not until the beginning of February and I have no right to disturb you at a moment when you are perhaps thinking of taking wing towards the South." [Lord Spooner owned a villa at Santa Margherita.]

"I am sorry to have to tell you, however, that certain difficulties have arisen during the last few days. I warned you of this possibility when I recently had the pleasure of calling on you in Chesham Square and you were kind enough to assure me of your support, as were William Nutting and others. The fact is that Rodney Webb, whose term as a Housemaster I decided to bring to an end, refuses to quit his House although I have arranged for alternative accommodation in Carlton Close. Webb is being sustained in his attitude by some of the Science Staff, by George Medlicott and *mirabile dictu* by Hubert Carpindale. The true instigator of the plot, as I believe I mentioned to you, is Godfrey Norman, whose position in the world

of affairs may be thought to lend him some importance. It seems that one Nigel Cresswell, an Old Webbite, is acting as legal adviser. I have refused to meet a self-constituted delegation of these people, since I require no assistance in performing my duty as Headmaster.

"A letter signed by Rodney Webb and evidently written under legal advice now informs me that he 'exercises his right of appeal to the Governing Body' and refuses to surrender his House in the mean time. He has dared to communicate with the Bursar, cancelling the arrangement to move him into Carlton Close. The basis of his defiance of my authority seems to be that my decision to remove him was reached without good reason and that, in some unexplained fashion, he was given inadequate notice.

"Probably Cresswell, who is not lacking in assurance, will approach the Governing Body on his own account to demand an *ad hoc* meeting to consider the appeal. Such a proceeding is already mooted in the letter which I have received from Rodney Webb but which bears the mark of Cresswell's inspiration. In the ordinary way you would perhaps think fit to reject such a demand as being inconsistent with the statutory requirements, providing as they do for the six meetings a year on stated occasions during term-time. However, it is highly inadvisable that the School should reassemble on January 18th with the dispute with Webb still unsettled and with Webb himself in a state of siege in his House. The Masters' Common Room might be tempted to take sides for or against myself in accordance with personal predilections and the boys would be encouraged in indiscipline.

"May I therefore express the hope, dear Warden, that you will prevail upon your fellow-Governors to come together before the beginning of term and thus frustrate the forces working for division at Godsell? I know the inconvenience which will be caused, not least to yourself, but I also believe I know how deep will be your desire to avoid a scandal. Unfortunately John Jordan's services are not available, as he is abroad, but my own endeavours are at your disposal, as always."

Cecil Dormer-Wills did not sign his name at the foot of the letter but made a fair copy in which he altered or omitted some phrases which could be regarded as prejudicial: "*mirabile dictu*", "whose position in the world of affairs may be thought to lend him some importance" and "dared to communicate with the Bursar". He left intact, however, his formulation about Rodney Webb "in some unexplained fashion" being given inadequate notice, even though this was the most prejudicial of all. He signed the fair copy, and then corrected the original and locked it away in his drawer. The whole operation had taken him more than an hour but he was still in time to catch the evening post.

Lord Spooner did not receive the letter until some hours after it had been delivered at the house in Chesham Square which he shared with his son and his son's family It lay on the oak chest in the hall until the son, finding it there with some others untouched on his return to lunch, took them to the window-seat in the library where the old man was reading.

"Letters for you, Wilf."

"That's kind of you."

"We've got people to lunch. Will you be there?"

"I'll just come and collect a little salad."

"As you like."

The Godsell letter was immediately identifiable by the *Noli Peccare* crest on the envelope. Lord Spooner read it with mounting concern. He remembered the conversation with the Headmaster and tried to summon up what he knew and thought about Rodney Webb. The man was surely no fire-brand, but rather an unalarming progressive. Still, the emergency seemed to be real and time was short. With the aid of his diary he counted twelve days to the beginning of the next term. It would be inappropriate for the Governing Body to meet at Godsell, even if the usual machinery could have been counted upon. This meeting would be quasi-judicial, with the Headmaster as a party to the dispute, and it needed to be clothed in a certain impartial dignity. London was the best place for it.

By a quarter past one Lord Spooner's mind was made up in a number of different directions. He entered the dining-room with his shuffling step and had an impression of young, bright faces, turned towards him as introductions were made. On these occasions, in order to avoid being unnecessarily delayed, he was apt to exaggerate the symptoms of old age and even to feign deafness. But to-day there was an emergency. Having taken his salad from the big wooden bowl, and before turning away, he turned to his son Miles at the head of the table.

"Could I borrow Mrs. Cannon this afternoon?"

"Of course. Do you want her here?"

"Please."

"About quarter to three? Will that do?"

"Yes, indeed. I've cancelled the car."

"Is anything wrong, Wilf? Oh, well, never mind."

Lord Spooner had withdrawn with his salad to the library. He felt dull and old among people he did not know and preferred his own company. Also, being alone, he could work out what he needed to do about the appeal.

"I want a notice to go to all members of the Governing Body of Godsell," he told the secretary when she arrived. "It should say: 'An extraordinary meeting of the Governing Body of Godsell School will be held at X time on Y date at Z place to consider an appeal by Rodney Webb, Esq., M.A., against a decision of the Headmaster to terminate his appointment as a Housemaster. It is anticipated that the hearing will last for one day only, but an extension to the following day is regarded as possible since legal assistance has been invoked.' Signed by me as the Warden."

"And the time and date, Lord Spooner?"

"What I have in mind is ten o'clock on the morning of Saturday, January 14th. A Saturday's likely to be best, at short notice, I think. But I'd like you to telephone round in the order: Nutting, Mayburn, Hancock, Barstow, let's see—Stephens, Levins, Boddington. I hope the numbers are all in my book. Put them through to me on the extension if any of them want to discuss the matter. Otherwise just find out whether they can

come. If they can't, see if another day would do. It must be before January 18th, when term begins."

"What about the place?"

Try the Society. Appleby's the man to talk to. But you'll want to get the date fixed first."

"Of course, Lord Spooner."

"There's one other thing. I was going to Santa Margherita on the Wednesday. You'd better put that off. The travel agent's number's Mayfair something."

"Yes, I know it," said the admirable Mrs. Cannon, "But what a shame to disturb your plans!"

In a surprisingly short time she was back to announce that almost all had gone smoothly. Barstow was ill, and unlikely to be able to attend, and Hancock was on a visit to the United States. Otherwise the Governors were available on the Saturday suggested. The beautiful conference room in Adelphi had been booked with the Society's secretary. Lord Spooner, resting against a pile of cushions with his feet up on the window-seat, felt entitled to claim credit.

"We move a bit quicker than Jordan, don't you think?" he asked.

John Jordan was the part-time master who with the help of a typist constituted the secretariat of the Governing Body.

"Mr. Jordan likes things to be what he calls 'just so'."

"Yes, even down to putting our favourite books in the right bedrooms. I get the *Golden Treasury* and Tony Mayburn gets *Middlemarch*. I can't think what Giles Hancock gets. Something comfortingly infantile, perhaps, to offset the terrors of modern science. How long will he be in America?"

"Only till Monday, and I've left messages."

"Well done. Did the others say anything of note or did you talk to the wives and secretaries?"

"Mostly, but Mr. Boddington confided to me that he wasn't surprised and he'd been expecting something of the kind."

"Did he? *I'm* not surprised by *that*. You'll send the notice round, then. And I'd like to write a personal letter with it to Tony Mayburn."

"Yes, Lord Spooner."

He wanted to ask her to address him less formally, but was sure she would not obey. Her perceptive conversation, which he enjoyed as much as her good looks, was always charged with a damping respect.

"'Dear Tony,'" he dictated, "'you can imagine that I am not very happy at the prospect of sitting in judgement on our own people. This is both a more important and a more distasteful matter than those which we usually have to consider and the price of being wrong might be heavy. I rely on you to stand by me, because you have a wise head and also you know about the mysteries of procedure, which I emphatically don't. Let us lunch quietly, away from the others, which will give us the opportunity of a word together when we already know the gravamen of the charge.' You can manage gravamen, can you?"

"I hope so, Lord Spooner."

"Then just end up 'with the customary apology for my laziness in not writing in my own hand', and I'll put my name. And of course I must reply to Cecil Dormer-Wills. I'll leave you to put in all the details, but I'd like to begin:

"'Please never feel the slightest hesitation in calling upon me for any service to Godsell. My occasional departures abroad can always be fitted in with more urgent affairs, such as the one which you tell me has now come to a head. I will not prejudge the issue by saying anything on this score, but I am sure you are right in wanting Rodney Webb's appeal to be settled before the new term begins. The arrangements which I have been able to make'—and there you can put them all in and say at the end: 'It is important for Jordan to be present at the hearing and I propose sending a notice to him, care of Godsell, for forwarding to his holiday address.' And a new paragraph.

"'One further point occurs to me. As Rodney Webb has taken the step of having himself legally represented, I am wondering whether you should do the same. Webb may be getting a lawyer's services for nothing, while you would be liable for a large sum. Please keep me informed on this issue, which the Governing Body is bound to regard as affecting the fairness of the hearing. I for my

part would be happier if both sides had the same advantage.' So there we are. I don't think there's anything else we need say, is there? To wish him good luck would be deplorably partial."

"I'm afraid my sympathies are on the other side," said Mrs. Cannon.

"Really? On what grounds?"

"None that are worth mentioning. Are there any other letters, Lord Spooner?"

He was obliged to recognize that he had been gently put in his place and would discover nothing more.

"Yes, to Rodney Webb. At this stage we'll ignore Cresswell, as he hasn't yet written to me. Say to Webb that 'the Governing Body of Godsell School has taken note of your appeal against the Headmaster's decision to terminate your appointment as a Housemaster. An emergency meeting will accordingly be held', and put in all the details, 'in order to hear evidence and adjudicate on the appeal. Kindly let me know whether you prefer to conduct your own case or to employ counsel. The Governing Body would in any case ask you to be in attendance in order to give evidence on your own behalf.'"

"'Dear Mr. Webb' and 'yours sincerely'?" asked the secretary.

"Let me think. 'My dear Webb' and 'yours sincerely'."

"In the United States, where I used to work, the 'my dear' form is considered rather patronizing."

Lord Spooner considered.

"It *is* a little patronizing," he agreed, "even in England, but in England we're more used to patronage."

When he had watched Mrs. Cannon cross the room with her long-legged, graceful walk and disappear, it occurred to him to wish that he was more often given a real job of work to do. The hearing of Webb's appeal was still a comforting number of days ahead, but he was aware how quickly it would be over and speeding back into the past. Would it, he wondered, be in any way memorable? He knew that his own function, as Warden, would be to prop up the authority of the Headmaster whatever the theoretical rights and wrongs of the case might be. Godsell could not be allowed to become divided against itself. Yet he recalled with

curiosity and a lingering discomfort the admission of Jane Cannon that her sympathies were on the other side. He would do anything to avoid a collision.

15

PROFESSIONALS

CECIL Dormer-Wills was in doubt on the question put to him by the Warden: should he employ counsel or should he conduct his own case? Sir William Nutting, when consulted, gave the opinion that a barrister was unnecessary. According to him, a firm and authoritative statement from the Headmaster's own lips would be more than enough, "but don't say I told you so."

Out of the salary of £3,800 a year, which had been unchanged for almost exactly a century, the Headmaster was able to save very little. He had a number of perquisites besides the salary, but these tended to lead to further expense and hospitality was difficult to keep within narrow limits. Until the death of his mother he was unlikely to have any spare money. Thus Nutting's advice chimed in with other material factors. He was also conceited enough to believe that he could have excelled at the Law as well as in the Church or education. He did not relish the idea of passing over his case to a stranger who knew nothing of the School and would miss the finer points. With the possible exception of Boddington and Levins, he believed that the Governing Body would respond more to his own power of exposition. Self-representation would certainly protect him against any cunning tricks of Cresswell's. As a contrast to the lawyer's style, he would appear the meticulous and unimpassioned schoolmaster.

In the absence of Edith Foster he began to compose in his own hand a statement of his case. So conscious was he of the rightness of this, and the wrongness of Rodney Webb's, that he found the task a rewarding one.

His opponent Nigel Cresswell was not so preoccupied by the detail of dates and decisions. He disliked doing work for nothing, but if he once took it on he put into it all the energy which had earned him his reputation. He began by borrowing from Rodney the printed list of the names and addresses of boys in the School. Of the three recommendations for monitorship which Rodney had

made, he observed that one boy lived near Oban, one in the Isle of Purbeck and one at Maidenhead.

"Oban's too far for me," he said, "but fortunately that's the one who was expelled. I'll go and see the other two, Pooley and Picton."

"You won't get anything out of them that I haven't told you, I'm afraid."

"Won't I? How much do you bet? "

Cresswell had a way of rallying Rodney out of the gloom which easily seeped into his spirit. The lawyer's manner, brotherly and unconcerned, seemed to dismiss anxieties as irrelevant and point to activity as the one valid requirement. Rodney went to work telephoning to Reginald Pooley and Mrs. Picton to give them notice of the visits.

"I'll want to talk to your psychiatrist, too. If he's sensible, I'll want to call him as a witness at the hearing. Is he?" asked Cresswell.

"Yes, eminently sensible. Shall I try and get on to him?"

"Please."

Percy Haddow was willing to be interviewed and also to attend the hearing. An appointment with him was arranged, but this was for the following afternoon and the lawyer's first journey was to the south. Shrivelled fringes of snow still clung to the roadsides and there were pools of snow in ditches and fields where he crossed over Cranborne Chase. The road was almost clear of traffic and he made good time, arriving in Wareham by lunch-time. A half-hearted invitation to the meal had been extended by the Pooleys, but he preferred to eat alone and plan his moves.

It was three o'clock when he reached the Pooleys' and rang the whimsically chiming bell in the Barfield part of the house. As he was waiting Frank Pooley appeared and welcomed him with an urbanity tinged with nervousness. The parents had gone out "to leave the coast clear." Would the girls be in the way? Nigel Cresswell studied the girls, Mary-Anne and Sylvia, and guessed that the latter might be a figure in the case. He said that they would be no trouble at all.

The lawyer sat facing Frank and told him, without any concealment, about the threatened dismissal of Rodney Webb and the appeal. The two girls remained quietly in the background and after a few minutes Mary-Anne went out.

"I can't believe it," Frank Pooley said. "Surely a notice would have come round. I'm sure the pater hasn't heard anything or he'd have told me."

"The point is that Mr. Webb's appealed and nothing will be decided until the hearing."

"Yes, I see."

"I'd like to hear your story of the trouble you were in, if you don't mind."

Frank gave a lame account, sometimes applying to Sylvia for confirmation.

"We were lucky, though," she said at one point and the lawyer was able to extract the story of the escape on White Horse Down.

"You'd have been expelled, like your friend McBain, wouldn't you?" he asked and went on: "Do you have the impression that relationships with girls are taken more notice of by the School than ones with other boys?"

"Oh yes, far more. Even Mr. Webb falls over backwards to be fair to queers. There's this other chap, you see—"

"Tony Picton?"

"Yes, well, he wasn't even beaten. I don't think he was sent up to Cecil, even. Sorry, sir. That's the Headmaster. There's a kind of hypocrisy in the School's attitude, if you know what I mean."

"I believe I do, but it would help if you could give me an example."

"Well, Fatty Carpindale—that's the senior chaplain—sometimes preaches about boys saying the word 'bloody'. But the point is, that's absolutely mild compared with what they really do say. If Fatty listened, he'd hear this smut that's always being talked, but he and Cecil pretend that everything's lovely in the garden until a case like the Picton one comes along, which is only one of a number, as everybody knows."

"But you say this case, the Picton one, was more or less condoned."

"That's right, sir. The attitude is to ignore the whole thing as long as possible. Then, if it can't be ignored because some tactless idiot like Matron sticks her oar in"—Nigel Cresswell made a note on his writing-pad—"there's a great fuss as if some exceptional event had occurred. But it's still not as serious as the fuss over an affair with a girl. That's the real sin all right, according to the Godsell Commandments."

Frank Pooley developed his theme, pleased to find an audience more receptive than the Headmaster had been. But the lawyer was soon veering in a different direction.

"I'd like to put a rather blunt question to you," he said. "Perhaps you'd prefer your friend to leave the room first."

"Er—I don't think so. Would you, Sylvia?"

Sylvia, looking apprehensive, shook her head.

"How far do these sexual affairs go, as a rule?"

"Do you mean the normal ones?"

"I mean either. Normal or abnormal."

"Quite a lot of chaps in the School say they've had proper affairs with girls, but most of them are obviously just boasting."

"What about McBain? He did, didn't he?"

"Yes, I think so."

Cresswell looked from Frank's face to Sylvia's and caught her confirming nod.

"What about you? You don't mind my asking?"

"We've never actually—"

"Thank you very much," said the lawyer very briskly, standing up to go.

"But you asked about the other cases, sir," Frank reminded him.

"Yes, so I did. But I expect the same answer applies, doesn't it? Boys at school aren't usually monsters of iniquity, at least in my experience. Please thank your parents for letting me come."

Driving away down the hill, Nigel Cresswell had to admit to himself that he had learnt very little. But the Matron might be important. He stopped at the hotel where he had lunched and telephoned to Webb's. Mrs. Joan Harrington, he discovered, was not in Godsell but was staying with a married sister in Ealing.

That being so, he took the most direct route to Maidenhead and arrived some time before seven.

Mrs. Picton showed a tendency to want to be present at his talk with her son, but in view of the difficulty of the topic he firmly discouraged her. Nor was the partner in sin present. Philip Mallaby, having been labelled by mother and son as a bore, had been sent home to the Midlands the day before.

The drawing-room was furnished with more taste and money than that of the Pooleys. There were a lot of books, some of which were French yellow-backs in an elegant glass-fronted case which interested Cresswell. He complimented Mrs. Picton on it while she was still in the room, asking if he would like a drink and telling Tony to take good care of him. She was charming and evidently clever, but he noticed an appraising and faintly reptilian look about her eyes.

"And what can I do for you?" Tony Picton asked blandly when his mother had gone.

The account of Rodney Webb's dismissal held all his attention. It was obvious that Tony, unlike Frank Pooley, liked and admired the Housemaster. His reaction to the news was to want to help in every way possible.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"For a start, you can tell me the story of your relationship with this other boy from the beginning. Don't leave out more than you need. As a lawyer I'm used to hearing all about the facts of life and I'm not easily shocked."

Nigel Cresswell put himself out to conceal his own nature and to adopt a neutral mask, as if one human activity and another were much the same. No great pretence was involved, for he was liberal by inclination and had worked for reform of the law on homosexuality, but he was far from being truly impartial. Tony Picton's emotional life, suspended between a dominant mother and a subservient boy, seemed to him pitiful, and all the more so when a flavour of boastfulness came into the narration.

It was when Tony came to the matter of his second offence that the lawyer's attention sharpened.

"You let Mr. Webb down, did you?" he asked.

"I'd warned Rodney that he oughtn't to rely on me."

"But you did let him down?"

"According to the letter of the law I did. You see, I wasn't supposed ever to speak to Phil again."

"And how did you come to speak to him?"

Nigel Cresswell listened with the greatest care.

"You won't get anything out of them," Rodney had said, but Rodney had been wrong.

"Tell me," Cresswell said, "about the Matron."

"She's kinky or something. She's always snooping round looking for vice so as to report it to poor old Rodney."

"What seems to be the trouble with her?"

"I don't really know. I don't think anybody does, except perhaps her ex-husband."

"What does he do when he's at home?"

"That's just the point," said Tony. "He's not at home. According to rumour he has to live out of the country. Matron hasn't seen him for years."

"Why does he have to live abroad?"

"Ah, that's what we'd all like to know, but Matron's careful never to give anything away. She just goes on about how much she could reveal if her lips were ever unsealed."

"I shall want you," the lawyer said, changing the subject, "to come and give evidence at the hearing."

"Yes, all right. What am I expected to say?"

"Just answer questions truthfully. Tell the Governing Body what you've told me."

"How's that going to help Rodney?"

"I believe it will, and I'm not entirely inexperienced."

Cresswell gave details of the time and place, refused an invitation from the mother to stay to dinner and climbed wearily into his car.

"What's this other boy, Mallaby, like? What impression does he make?" he asked as Tony Picton stood beside the window.

"Oh, he's apt to blub all over the place. He's a good-looking boy, but not exactly bright, if you know what I mean. As a matter of fact he's been staying with me during the hols."

It was nearly nine o'clock when he reached home. There was a note in the hall, explaining that his wife had gone out and left some food for him. He ate a little and sat smoking a cheroot and reading until he heard her key in the lock.

The house in Ealing, where Joan Harrington was staying, had an unoccupied look and the lawyer pressed the bell next morning without much hope. At the sound, however, the yapping of a terrier came from behind the stained-glass panels of the door. This was opened cautiously by a small woman wrapped in a dressing-gown. She looked with some dismay at the elegant combination of lifted bowler, briefcase and dark overcoat.

"Mrs. Harrington?"

"No. I'm her sister, Mrs. Tombs. Is it—is it the School?"

"In a way it is. My name is Cresswell and I'm a solicitor. I've come in connexion with the School."

"Joanie!" the woman shouted unexpectedly, half turning her head, and there was an increased tumult from the dog which skidded into sight on the brown linoleum of the hallway. Behind it appeared a figure which could have been no other than the Matron of Webb's, Cresswell decided, with her military bearing and gleaming, rubicund face under the cropped hair. When he introduced himself and announced his mission, she faced him with suspicion.

"What do you want from me? There's nothing I can tell you."

She and the dog were standing side by side in attitudes of equal intransigence.

"I may need to call you as a witness at the hearing of the appeal," he said.

"Why me, specially?"

"Because you reported that you saw certain acts in Mr. Webb's House. It may be necessary for you to describe what you saw."

"And supposing I refuse?"

"Your refusal will have to be explained to the Governing Body of the School, which is conducting the hearing."

"Then I'll wait until I hear from the Governing Body."

"Very well, Mrs. Harrington."

The Scotch terrier, taking its cue from its mistress, began to yap again and to make small, hostile rushes forward on the linoleum. Nigel Cresswell could see no alternative to an orderly withdrawal.

"I shall give instructions," he said, "that I want you to be called as a witness."

A second later the door had shut in his face. Looking up, he could make out the shape of Mrs. Tombs watching his discomfiture from behind lace curtains. It seemed to him that he had gained remarkably little from his excursion to Ealing.

He was received more kindly when he made his afternoon call in Wimpole Street. A pretty young girl took him up in a slow, old-fashioned lift to Percy Haddow's consulting-room, so that there was plenty of time for conversation on the way.

"I expect you're kept very busy, aren't you?" Cresswell asked.

"Yes, it never lets up and we get all sorts."

"I'm not a patient myself," the lawyer found it necessary to point out, wondering into which of the doctor's curious categories he would fit best.

The pretty girl was asked by Percy Haddow to provide tea and biscuits, which put the consultation on a comradely level between professionals. But the doctor left his tea almost untouched and joined his hands in the supplicating position which he often adopted with patients.

"Let me make something clear," he began. "I didn't come into this case as a psychiatrist, but as a friend of Rodney Webb's. I was doubtful about my precise standing in talking to the boys who had been discovered *in flagrante delicto*. All I can do for you, Mr. Cresswell, is to give you my opinion based upon one conversation in each case."

"I'd like to hear that opinion, while accepting the limitations."

"Well, then, Picton is a boy of high intelligence, good at his work, capable of a useful and even perhaps a brilliant career, but he'll always have to live with the fact that he's a sexual invert. My impression is that he's highly sexed and incapable, except for a short period, of steering clear of entanglements with other boys. Any sort of punishment, such as beating or expulsion, would be

irrelevant and probably harmful to him. I consider that Rodney Webb handled his case correctly."

"Would it be consistent with your view if Picton stuck by his bargain to be continent for a week or two, but lapsed sooner or later?"

"Yes. Yes, it would."

"Incidentally, am I right in assuming that an affair like this only goes to a certain stage?" asked Cresswell.

"Yes, in a general way. Lots of affairs with girls at that age only go to a certain stage. But with homosexuals there's often an extra reluctance or a distaste for going the whole way and some of them find the idea profoundly shocking. It's difficult to be categorical on the subject."

"And what about the other boy, Mallaby?"

"Rather a helpless figure at the moment, I should say. The natural victim of a seducer such as Picton, but a victim who enjoys being a victim. He's a case of regression, of being stuck at an early point of his development, rather than being an invert. He'll probably never develop a fully normal sex-life, but his sense of guilt will keep him out of trouble. I've known similar cases who have gone into the Church. Perhaps it's not a bad solution."

"What," asked Nigel Cresswell on a sudden impulse, "is your candid opinion of Cecil Dormer-Wills?"

Percy Haddow showed a gleam of appreciation.

"I see what you're aiming at," he said. "It's amusing to guess that Dormer-Wills is a case in point, but I haven't enough evidence to back it up. I've only met him once, which was when I was trespassing on the School precincts. He read me a lecture about the privilege of walking on the path and then allowed me to carry on. I couldn't draw any conclusions from such a brief encounter."

"Do you have a theory about why he should come down on Rodney Webb?"

"I saw from the notice-board that he was giving a talk to the boys on St. Paul. I expect he resents any interference with the theological system of rewards and punishments, particularly punishments. The punishment of sex may be important to him for

reasons which he's not fully aware of. Rodney Webb probably seems to him the worst sort of permissive modern liberal and a danger to the legacy of the Founder, who I believe was called Canon Barstow and was very strict in these matters."

"What chance do you think we have, Dr. Haddow, of convincing the Governing Body that Rodney's right and the Headmaster wrong?"

"I notice you say 'we'. Do I come into this?"

"I hope so. I want you as my key witness. I want you to put the argument that Rodney Webb was acting in accordance with the most acceptable modern theory, in handling Picton and Mallaby as he did. It would be tactless to cast specific aspersions at Canon Barstow, whom you mentioned, but there would be no harm in indicating that he died before the main advances in the field of sexual psychology were made. Your point about punishment being irrelevant and harmful is the central one, I'm sure. We have to make the Headmaster appear old-fashioned by comparison with the clever, younger men on his Staff such as Rodney Webb. We even have to make him look prejudiced without exactly saying so. It may sound a bit ruthless, talking in this fashion, but we have to be ruthless if we're to stand a chance. Every instinct and principle which can be invoked will incline the Governing Body to defend its own hired servant, the Headmaster, and sustain him in his authority. In fact the question which I put to you—what chance do we have?—can almost be answered in the words 'precious little'."

"You say it almost can?"

"I believe you and I together can change the verdict. We're professionals, whereas the Governing Body of a school is the most amateurish collection of human beings conceivable."

"We can play on their weaknesses, you mean, in order to make them act against their own best interests. But if we do that, even in the good cause of helping Rodney Webb, what will happen to the School?"

"My opinion is that the School will need to find itself a new Headmaster," said Nigel Cresswell deliberately.

"Is there somebody, though? Is there a Number Two?"

"The Number Two, as you call him, is a certain H.B. Ellice, the Master in College."

"And what kind of a person is he?"

"He was getting beyond his best when I was in the School," explained Cresswell without any further comment.

16

THE HEARING OPENS

DR. GILES Hancock and Jeremy Boddington recognized one another at a distance on the pavement outside the elegant building in Adelphi. Hancock, who was the first at the doors, waited until the other arrived and then, with his natural authority, indicated that they should delay a moment. Lord Spooner's head of distinguished white hair could be seen just inside, so they moved out of the line of sight.

"What's it about?" asked Hancock. "Webb's a reasonable fellow, isn't he?"

Boddington looked down from a height, his face lit by a compassionate smile.

"He is indeed. Possibly that's the trouble. Our Headmaster prefers what he calls ancient wisdom to reason."

"Can you explain that term?"

"Ancient wisdom? It's what people thought before they had the chance of knowing any better."

They lapsed into silence as Cecil Dormer-Wills himself stepped out of a taxi on to the kerb.

"Better go in, hadn't we?" whispered Hancock.

But Jeremy Boddington had no intention of missing the encounter with his enemy the Headmaster.

"You go in," he whispered back and waited until the taxi-driver had been paid.

Dormer-Wills looked grey and chilly in complexion and smaller than ever when confronted by the towering Boddington.

"Good morning, Headmaster. You must have made an early start."

"I always rise early—er—Boddington."

Without wasting more words he scuttled past and was soon greeting Lord Spooner, who walked a few steps with a friendly hand on his arm. Jeremy Boddington followed more slowly, scanning the large room in order to discover who had arrived. He

steered towards Harry Levins of Cambridge, with whom he shared various, as they both considered, wholesome prejudices.

"I was informing Giles," he mentioned, "that we may find Reason herself on trial."

Levins's long, kindly face seemed constantly to be reflecting the sorrows and troubles of other people. By ordinary standards he was an ugly man but habitual generosity of spirit had set a pleasant stamp on his appearance.

"I hope," he said earnestly, "that there's no truth in what I hear."

"What do you hear, Harry?"

"Ah, the less said the better at this stage."

"I won't allow you to be mysterious with me, Harry."

"Very well, then. I was talking to Godfrey Norman. According to him, Cecil's been behaving in a way which seems unlike him in character. Aloof and autocratic, Godfrey told me. He refused to see a delegation, which was trying to sort this business out."

"The Rodney Webb business?"

As if the mention of his name had rendered him visible, Rodney could be perceived seated in a corner of the room with another man.

"Who's that with Webb now?" asked Boddington.

"It's his lawyer, Nigel Cresswell. He was in my year at Balliol, actually, but I don't know him well."

They turned their gaze to a trio consisting of Lord Spooner, Sir William Nutting and Oliver Stephens, which was in close conference at the foot of the staircase which led up to the conference room on the first floor.

"I can't think," Spooner was saying, "why Tony isn't here by now."

He was slightly pained that his friend, to whom he had written specially, was not yet at hand to sustain him with advice and encouragement.

"He's got a lot on his plate, I know," Oliver Stephens contributed, with his way of always seeming well-informed.

"I hardly think we can start without him," said Nutting.

"No, of course we can't. He's got to tell us what to do. To all intents and purposes, here we are meeting as a court of appeal and none of us have any knowledge of the law, except Tony."

"Common sense ought to be a good enough guide," was Nutting's opinion. "Nobody knows as well as we do where the School's interests lie."

"Yes, but justice has to be seen to be done, as well as done. That's Tony's importance to us. He can supply what Bagehot calls the dignified part of the proceedings."

At a table nearby Cecil Dormer-Wills was sitting sorting some papers, which he had taken out of a pale green cardboard file. John Jordan, the Secretary to the Board of Governors, an elderly man of austere and under-nourished appearance, hovered above him.

"It would be a lot easier in the conference room," the Headmaster complained.

"We don't know the procedure yet, I'm afraid. I was trying to get a ruling from the Warden just now, but he's not sure whether the two parties should be present in the room during the whole of the hearing. He feels that Mr. Mayburn ought to decide."

Giles Hancock, during this exchange, was standing within earshot and formulating a conversational approach to the Headmaster which would be civil and sympathetic, while at the same time impartial. Before he had discovered the solution there was a slight commotion at the doors. Anthony Mayburn entered and handed his bowler hat to a servant.

The moment was accurately chosen. The eyes of everybody in the room were directed towards the handsome, burly man advancing upon the Warden. Their ears were trained to catch whatever he said and some of them picked up an excuse which was connected with the Lord Chancellor. The Warden glanced at his watch. It was only a quarter of an hour after the time set for the opening of the hearing, so no breach of the conventions had occurred.

"We were wondering, Tony, about the procedure. Should Cecil be with us?"

"Not to start with," said Tony Mayburn, mounting the stairs. "We should meet as the Governing Body and discuss what to do.

The Secretary should ask Cecil and the others to wait for the time being, if that's your pleasure, Warden."

"Yes, certainly. Jordan, did you hear that? Ask the Headmaster and Mr. Webb if they'd be good enough to wait."

The other Governors joined the party surging up the stairs. From the top, where a gallery ran along to the entrance of the conference room, they could look down on the disputants, Rodney Webb absorbed in conversation in the corner and the Headmaster alone at a table in the centre. A woman with a pretty-looking boy had just entered from the street.

"For Heaven's sake," said Mayburn, "we shall need somewhere to hide the witnesses. We can't have them making a spectacle of themselves on the Society's premises."

Harry Levins, who was close beside him, sniffed the odour of prejudice and began to look alarmed.

"I think it's all right," the Warden assured them, leaning over the rail of the gallery. "Appleby has a keen eye for that sort of thing. He'll see that they're put somewhere suitable."

Indeed, at that moment the reliable Appleby came from his office and the Governing Body could resume its forward movement. The Warden entered the conference room and was guided by Mayburn to the head of the polished mahogany table, on which pads of paper and pencils had been laid out. Mayburn himself took the place on his left, leaving that on the right for the Secretary.

"Please!" said Lord Spooner with a gesture which indicated that the Governors should seat themselves as they pleased.

Sir William Nutting, a little annoyed at being deprived of the post of honour beside the Warden, sat down next to Jordan and Oliver Stephens took the place beside him. On the other side, next to Mayburn, were Hancock, Boddington and Levins. Nearly half the space at the table was still unoccupied.

"Would it be appropriate, Tony," asked Spooner, "for you to give us a little lecture on the legal procedure which we should follow?"

"The procedure is unimportant in itself," Mayburn stated. "This not a court of law. We're here to mete out natural justice."

"Common sense is another word for it, isn't it?" put in Nutting.

"Not altogether, William. In some circumstances it might be common sense to act in an unjust manner, but we are here to see justice done."

"If I understand you, Tony," said Spooner, "natural justice is justice as it's understood by people untrained in the law."

"That's good enough as a definition, I think, Warden."

They went on to discuss the question of attendance by the Headmaster and Rodney Webb. It was agreed that both should be continuously present, together with Rodney's lawyer, during the hearing. The Warden said that the Headmaster should be given the chance to speak first, in order to explain the principles according to which he had acted, but Boddington and Levins strongly disagreed. This was embarrassing to Lord Spooner, who had given assurances on the point to Dormer-Wills. With Mayburn's support he was able to get his own way.

So much having been settled, John Jordan was asked to summon the two parties to the conference room. He returned leading the Headmaster in procession, as if the latter had already gained his bishopric. Stopping in the doorway, Jordan indicated with a gesture the side of the table occupied by the progressive alliance of Boddington and Levins. Dormer-Wills was seen to shrink, but took the place beside Levins. A moment later Rodney Webb was ushered to the chair immediately opposite Dormer-Wills and the lawyer to the one at his side. There was still room at the end of the table for witnesses.

"This special or extraordinary meeting of the Board of Governors," the Warden explained, "is for the purpose of hearing an appeal by Rodney Webb against a decision of the Headmaster to deprive him of his Housemastership. The right of appeal in such a case is conferred by our Statutes. In the ordinary way we should perhaps have waited until our next regular meeting, but there are circumstances which make such a course inadvisable."

"What are these circumstances, Warden?" asked Boddington. "Are we allowed to know?"

It was the breeziness and lack of ordinary inhibition in Jeremy Boddington which particularly exacerbated the Headmaster. Now,

hearing the confident, consciously "charming" voice, he had a sensation of nausea and was not at all comforted when the Warden tamely answered:

"I don't think there's any secret, as far as we're concerned. Rodney Webb here has refused to give up possession of his House, pending the hearing of the appeal. That's why it seems expedient to hold the hearing before the beginning of term. We want everything cut and dried before the Staff and the boys come back from their holidays. The last thing Godsell can afford is a public argument on its own door-step."

"Thank you, Warden," said Boddington in what the Headmaster considered was a subtly patronizing tone.

"Well, now, I'd like to call on the Headmaster to give us the background of the case as he sees it: what his powers are as Headmaster and how he applied them in practice. I hope you agree with that, Mr. Cresswell?"

"I see no reason to disagree, provided that the Headmaster does just what you say."

"Cecil, will you address us, please?"

The deadness of the Headmaster's expression concealed a torrent of emotion as he put his notes in order and prepared to speak. He was used to respect and consideration, even subservience. That his decisions should be called in question in front of people like Boddington was unheard of. Its effect was to harden his will-power and make him determined to assert his supremacy.

"If you'll pardon me, Warden," he began, "I propose to remain seated. It makes it easier for me to consult my papers, which have a great deal of bearing on this case. I'd like first to direct your attention to the Godsell Statutes and especially to the Statute which provides that 'Housemasters hold their office at the discretion of the Headmaster, who has the power to terminate and also to continue such office, but in no case beyond a term of twenty years'. Thus there is no limitation of my authority, except for the further provision that there is a right of appeal to the Governing Body, as you have mentioned, Warden.

"Clearly it devolves on the Headmaster, if faced by an appeal, to explain the reasons which led him to take the action in ques-

tion. It is within the knowledge of some of those seated at this table that the late Headmaster, Dr. Adrian Massingbird, compiled a list of offences which it is obligatory to refer to the Headmaster. I have that list before me and it includes homosexual offences. When I assumed the Headmastership I specifically confirmed that Dr. Massingbird's ruling was still in force. I have here a copy from my files of the memorandum which I addressed to all Housemasters, including Rodney Webb. I can also show the original of his acknowledgement of receipt of the ruling. Contrary to his undertaking, Webb elected to suppress the fact of a homosexual offence in his House and to deal with this by unauthorized methods. Following this, he tried to insist on one of the offenders being made a monitor. I consequently ceased to have any confidence in him as a Housemaster."

"Were you convinced," asked the Warden earnestly, "that Rodney Webb was wrong in his treatment of the homosexual offence, apart from Dr. Massingbird's ruling?"

"Yes, I was. Webb went on the assumption, as I understand, that there would be no recurrence of the offence and in fact there *was* a recurrence of the offence. At that stage he began to change his own judgement of the boy in question—"

"Boy in question?" asked the Warden. "Surely there must have been two boys if there were homosexual offences."

"Yes, of course. I mean the senior boy, who was mainly responsible."

"And that is Picton?"

"Yes, Picton. The other boy is Mallaby."

"And they are both here, so Mr. Cresswell tells me, in case evidence from them should be required."

"I see no need for evidence, Warden," said Dormer-Wills. "The facts are presumably not in dispute."

Lord Spooner turned towards Cresswell, who glanced at the notes which he had been making.

"There is just one statement of fact by Dr. Dormer-Wills which I propose to dispute," he said mildly.

"Which one?"

The Headmaster had jerked up his head and the question was aimed directly at the lawyer.

Cresswell asked: "Should I answer now or in my address?"

A whispered consultation took place between the Warden and Anthony Mayburn. Then the Warden pronounced:

"We're here to listen to an appeal and I'm sure our best course is to do so without further delay or argument. After that we shall be in a better position to decide whether we need to hear any evidence. Mr. Cresswell!"

Nigel Cresswell spread his papers in a row on the table in front of him, got to his feet and stood for a moment looking down at them through horn-rimmed glasses.

"The Headmaster of Godsell," he began, "has himself told us that the revised Statutes of the School give a right of appeal by a Housemaster to the Governing Body, if he conceives himself to be deprived of his post without good reason. Clearly the purpose of this provision is to avoid any unfairness. In simple terms, I suggest that we are here to consider whether Rodney Webb has been or is being unfairly treated by his lawful superior.

"Now, there are no fewer than three ways in which I say that unfairness was shown to this Housemaster. Rodney Webb enjoys a high reputation in the School. On his behalf some distinguished members of the Staff and also Old Godsellites joined in an approach to the Headmaster when the fact of his dismissal became known. This approach was unfortunately and, you may think, a little inconsiderately brushed aside without examination or discussion."

Cresswell went on to give details of the letter to the Headmaster and the names of the signatories.

"Uppermost in the minds of these distinguished people," he went on, "was the feeling that Rodney Webb had acted precisely as a modern Housemaster in this Year of Grace was bound by his knowledge and his conscience to act. I intend to call before you a well-known psychiatrist, who will tell you that punishment of homosexual offences by the cane and by expulsion is an anachronism in our modern world and actually tends to exacerbate the condition it sets out to remedy. Of course, Dr. Dormer-Wills is

right to remind us of the rules which were formulated so many years ago by his predecessor Dr. Massingbird, and which he himself has confirmed as being still in force, but nowadays these rules make strange reading."

The lawyer picked up a piece of paper from the table.

"Blasphemy?" he asked. "Do modern Housemasters refer to the Headmaster when they hear the name of Jesus Christ misused or profaned? If they did, there'd be a long procession of offenders who'd done nothing more nor less than invoke that name when something irritating happened to them. No, these rules may be technically in force, but a sensible, modern person would regard some of them as a dead letter. Such a person would approach the problem of homosexuality with patience and understanding, as Rodney Webb has done, not try and eradicate it by irrational punishment.

"Rodney Webb believed there would be no recurrence of the offence which had been discovered in one of the dormitories in his House. After my investigation of the case, I'm sure he was justified in his belief. There *was* no recurrence of the offence. I shall ask the two boys to tell you so and I have trespassed on the kindness of the Governing Body to order the person who said there was a recurrence to attend this hearing and repeat her charge, if she dares."

"Who do you mean?" Dormer-Wills asked. "Warden, I'd like to know who is meant."

"It was the Matron of Webb's, Mrs. Joan Harrington," said Cresswell, "who reported the so-called recurrence to the Headmaster's secretary, Miss Edith Foster, who reported it to the Headmaster."

The lawyer waited to see if there would be any further interruption before he continued:

"Rodney Webb himself was unaware of the falsity of the charge of recurrence against the two boys. That was why he lost some of his faith in the boy Picton. But he was right in having faith, even if he didn't know he was right.

"A short while ago I mentioned that I intended to dispute a statement of fact by Dr. Dormer-Wills. The statement ran: 'There

was a recurrence of the offence.' That is the statement which I dispute. It has to be kept in mind that accusations against adolescent boys can have serious results. I expect we all know of the case of Joshua Smithers, who tried to take his own life in the School."

Nigel Cresswell looked round the table to try and estimate how much effect his arguments were having. Boddington and Levins, the progressives, were leaning away from the Headmaster and towards each other. Hancock was impassive, while Mayburn gave every sign of alert interest. The Old Guard of Nutting and Stephens was out of sight to the left, beyond Rodney Webb.

"I come now to the second way in which this Housemaster has been unfairly treated. He was given notice to leave the job and the House which he has occupied for fifteen years a few days before Christmas. Yet he was expected to clear out and move somewhere else before the beginning of term. He was given four weeks' notice after fifteen years. According to members of the Staff to whom I have spoken, this is contrary to all known precedents. It's been usual to give Housemasters at Godsell at least three months' notice and to terminate their service at the end of the academic year, not at Christmas.

"The third way in which unfairness has been shown to Rodney Webb is easily the most remarkable of the three. You may even find it virtually incomprehensible. The plain fact of the matter is that the Headmaster failed to notify Rodney Webb personally of the decision to deprive him of his Housemastership. He wrote instead to Mrs. Webb, telling her of the decision, so that she could pass the news on to her husband. Now, notice is something which requires to be communicated by the employer to the employed and to nobody else, not even to the wife of the employed."

Dormer-Wills, who had been listening with mounting irritation, now thrust his head forward towards the lawyer and said in a rapid voice:

"I did write to Webb. I wrote on the morning of December 19th and I know he received my letter, so there's nothing in what you say."

The Warden seemed to be on the point of intervening, but Dormer-Wills ceased speaking and the occasion passed. Nigel Cresswell waited for a moment and then resumed:

"A letter dated December 19th was sent from the Headmaster's office to Rodney Webb. It was sent because Rodney Webb spoke to a very senior master, Arthur Smith, and Arthur Smith spoke to the Headmaster and made it clear that a letter should be sent—that a letter had to be sent in order to communicate the notice in a proper manner. But the Headmaster is mistaken in saying that he wrote to Rodney Webb. It was the secretary, Miss Edith Foster, who wrote the letter."

"That's an absurd point. A busy man can't sign everything. Edith sometimes signs my letters to the Warden, doesn't she, Warden?"

"No doubt, no doubt," the Warden confirmed.

"I didn't use the word 'signed'," Cresswell went on. "I used the word 'wrote'. Just to remove any doubt on this point, I propose to read out the letter written by Miss Edith Foster to Rodney Webb, giving him his notice after fifteen years."

When he had read the letter Nigel Cresswell was conscious of having the full attention of the table. He asked:

"Wasn't this a slipshod and half-hearted attempt at giving notice to a Housemaster? The notice was delivered to the wrong person in the first place, and by the wrong person in the second place. Yet the Headmaster has the reputation of being a skilled and efficient administrator.

"Why was this unfairness and this administrative laxity shown towards Rodney Webb after his long and honourable service to Godsell? Why did the Headmaster depart from his normal rule of fairness and efficiency, as I submit that he did?"

"I did nothing of the kind," said Dormer-Wills, looking from the standing figure of Cresswell to the Warden, who again consulted in whispers with Anthony Mayburn.

"Mr. Cresswell," the Warden finally ruled, "has every right to tell us what he considers to be the truth about this matter."

"He has no right to criticize my efficiency as a Headmaster, as he was doing."

"I'm afraid he does, you know. This is an appeal against one of your decisions as Headmaster. It must involve some criticism, whether well-founded or ill-founded."

"Hear, hear, Warden!" exclaimed Jeremy Boddington.

This interjection produced an immediate effect. Cecil Dormer-Wills stood up so that he was facing Rodney Webb with a slight advantage of height. Rodney had no desire to attract attention, but felt it to be important that he should meet the other's furious stare. To the best of his ability he kept his features and especially his eyes entirely expressionless, in order to avoid any accusation of behaving in a provocative way.

"Perhaps you'll allow me to say a few words, Warden," said the Headmaster, "and since they'll be the last words I shall be saying I should be obliged if Mr. Cresswell would sit down."

"Have you finished, Mr. Cresswell?" Lord Spooner asked.

"I was hoping to make a few concluding remarks, Warden; but I'm more than ready to give way to the Headmaster."

"Thank you," Dormer-Wills said as Cresswell sat down. "I'm most grateful to you, Warden, because I can clearly see the course which this hearing is destined to take. Mr. Cresswell is about to introduce to you Webb's clever friend, Dr. Percy Haddow, who will prove to you that the system according to which Godsell operates so successfully is archaic and ridiculous according to modern ideas such as his own. Thereupon, the Matron will confess that she was animated by some complex or other when she reported the two boys for misconduct. The boys themselves will then make their appearance and tell you that they were guilty of a momentary lapse and from now on they will be wholly moral in their conduct. Rodney Webb, who has confessed to me how mistaken he was, will be praised to the skies as a progressive.

"That is Mr. Cresswell's plan of campaign, devised with all the skill which has made him successful in his chosen career. On the other side, I come before you without legal training, but quite capable of explaining what I believe in and why I do so. I believe that homosexuality is one of the deadliest dangers which beset a community such as our own. It is contagious and can spread quickly, ensnaring boys who have no natural inclination in that

direction, so that they afterwards feel regret and shame for the whole of their lifetime. The few who are really corrupt infect even the healthy, as I've had occasion to notice again and again. The remedy is simple and has nothing to do with modern progressive attitudes. The source of infection has to be removed, root and branch. Half-hearted measures, such as Webb indulged in, are a dangerous folly.

"As for the Matron of Webb's House, Godsell has cause to be grateful to her for exposing the infection at an early stage, when resolute action could still be effective. The idea that these two boys, who had been found in bed together during the daytime, are likely to reform after a solitary talk with a psychiatrist is one which does no credit to the persons holding it. As a matter of fact, I've made some inquiries and I happen to know that these boys have been staying in the same house together during the holidays. No doubt Mr. Cresswell is going to try and convince you that they didn't go to bed together again when they had the chance to do so.

"The boy Picton is one whom Rodney Webb wanted to make into a monitor, so that he'd have all the opportunity in the world to spread his infection under the cloak of authority. I tell you frankly, Warden and Governors, I have no use for a Housemaster with such faulty judgement. He must look for a place somewhere else than at my School, as long as I'm Headmaster here."

The Headmaster's blend of irony and forcefulness had been making an impression on the Governors, but all of a sudden he had crossed a line which they regarded as crucial. Their faces, turned towards him, were anxious, startled or even half stunned by the development.

"Does that mean," asked the Warden, "that you're not willing to have him on the staff at all?"

"Not now that my authority's been challenged and a lawyer put up to accuse me of unfairness and inefficiency. You must make your choice. You've heard the appeal and it's up to you to judge between Webb and myself. From now on, I'm afraid Godsell's going to be too small for both of us."

"You say we've heard the appeal," said Lord Spooner, "but there's still the question of whether there was a recurrence of the offence. There seems to be a conflict of opinion and I'm sure it's important for us to make up our minds one way or the other. Yes, Tony?"

The Warden gave way to his neighbour Anthony Mayburn, who was showing signs of wishing to speak.

"Even more important in my view is the changing attitude to homosexuality. If Rodney Webb was justified in the light of modern medical opinion in acting as he did then it's Massingbird's rules we should be looking into and not Webb's conduct. To help us in reaching an opinion, I'm sure we ought to take some professional advice, if it's available."

The Headmaster, Rodney Webb noticed, was having difficulty in keeping his temper. He was continuing to intervene, although he had long delivered his so-called last words.

"That may be Mayburn's opinion," he was saying hotly, "but I'm sorry to hear a psychiatrist being given equal weight with Adrian Massingbird's rules."

"Some of us, Warden," put in Jeremy Boddington, "would phrase that the other way round. We'd wonder why Dr. Massingbird would be given weight on a subject he was fairly ignorant of, to put it mildly."

"Ignorant?" repeated Dormer-Wills. "Massingbird ignorant?"

"Ignorant about the treatment of homosexuals, yes."

"Adrian Massingbird was incapable of being ignorant. You, Warden, will bear me out on that point at least."

Lord Spooner was looking unhappy. He glanced up at the clock and not for the first time regretted the slowness with which the hands seemed to be crawling round towards lunch-time.

"Mr. Cresswell," he said. "I believe you had some further remarks to make to us."

"Some of them have been made for me, Warden. The Governing Body itself is clearly divided on the importance which still requires to be attached to Dr. Massingbird's rulings on moral matters. In a historical context he has our respect as a distinguished scholar and a fine Headmaster, but his views have neces-

sarily lost some of their authority with the arrival on the scene of new learning. Dr. Percy Haddow is here—at least I hope he's here by now—to tell us what modern authority has to say on the matter."

"Well, then," the Warden took him up, "let us by all means hear Dr. Haddow."

"Not if you wish me to remain." Cecil Dormer-Wills was on his feet again, looking dominant and threatening in spite of his small stature.

"Warden, I really think—"

This was Sir William Nutting making his first contribution since the beginning of the hearing.

"Yes, William?"

"We have to keep our Headmaster with us."

"Tony!" the Warden appealed to Mayburn.

"If Dr. Haddow's evidence is material, as I consider it is, his evidence should be heard."

"Very well, then."

Dormer-Wills left his place at the table and marched to the door. Nutting was looking anguished, but nobody made any move to stop the Headmaster from leaving, which he did with a noticeable bang, if not a slam, of the door.

"Temper!" commented Jeremy Boddington.

17

LOVE, DEEP LOVE

IT was decided to carry on as if the Headmaster had been present. Rodney Webb and the lawyer remained in the conference room. At one o'clock the Warden went off to an argumentative lunch at his club with Anthony Mayburn, who was already impressed by Dr. Haddow's expert evidence.

"But we have to save Cecil," Lord Spooner maintained stubbornly.

"Our main job is to hear an appeal and Cecil hasn't helped things by behaving like a naughty child. He's succeeded in enlarging the whole scope of the case by refusing to accept Webb on the Staff. That means that we're sitting in judgement on the man's career and livelihood, not just on his status within the School."

"I know. I know," said the Warden miserably, filling his cup of coffee after Mayburn and drinking it standing up, since there was no time to look for comfortable leather chairs in the smoking-room.

Back in the conference room, Percy Haddow was soon reduced to answering questions of a sceptical and sometimes almost impolite kind, but remained unruffled.

"Don't you agree that we're better off without some boys?" asked Sir William Nutting.

"I can't afford to take such an attitude. People are only sent to me if they're in trouble."

"And you've got no objection to earning your fees out of them?"

"Not if they can afford to pay. In other cases I provide my services free."

"But if we get rid of these boys out of the School, doesn't that give the others a better chance?"

"I don't think so. The influence of the seducer has been shown to be very slight, compared with other factors."

"I must say, you astonish me."

When the doctor was at last allowed to depart, Boddington remarked:

"We ought to have him on the Governing Body. It would wake us up a bit, don't you think?"

Cresswell called Joan Harrington as a witness. He led her through the details of the offence in the dormitory, which had become no less prurient by repetition. Then he said abruptly:

"The second time you reported an offence between these boys, you said you saw them in a doorway. Did you see any physical contact between them? Anything of the kind you've just been describing to us?"

"It's a matter of where the boys were. I'm not sure I'd like to say in front of the Warden and Governors."

"One of them was in the lavatory and the other was talking to him in the doorway. There's nothing in that to shock the Governing Body, I don't think."

"It goes together," said Joan Harrington. "You always find them hanging round lavatories, those sort of creatures."

"May I ask how you know about these creatures, as you call them?"

"I've had my troubles in life, if that's what you mean."

"You've had your troubles in life and so you're easily upset when you come across these troubles among other people?"

"You can put it like that, if you like."

"When I asked you to come and give evidence before the Governing Body, why did you start by refusing?"

"I'm here, aren't I?"

"You're here because you were ordered to come. You received a written summons from the Warden. Why did you have to be ordered? Was it because you reported an offence which never happened, and you were afraid of being found out?"

The Matron remained silent.

"Please cast your mind back, Mrs. Harrington. What did you really see at the lavatory door?"

Silence again.

"I suppose the boys were whispering or laughing together, were they?"

"That's one way of calling it."

"And it's the right way, isn't it? If you saw something different, just tell us what you saw. You weren't at all backward in telling us about the offence in the dormitory, so why should you be backward in telling us about this one? It's because the offence never happened, isn't it?"

During the Matron's further silence the Warden observed:

"I think we've got your point, Mr. Cresswell. You want us to believe the Matron jumped to conclusions when she saw the boys talking, and she didn't really see a homosexual offence on that occasion."

"But she reported an offence," said the lawyer, "to the Headmaster's secretary."

"Not to Mr. Webb?"

"No, not at that stage."

"Is that correct, Mrs. Harrington?" asked the Warden.

"I tried to see Mr. Webb, sir, but he had no time for me and I had my duty to do."

"And were you afraid," asked Cresswell, "that Mr. Webb wouldn't take the right sort of action if you reported to him? Was that why you went to the Headmaster's secretary and reported the offence?"

"Dr. Dormer-Wills sent word to me. That's why, if you want to know."

"What sort of word did he send, Mrs. Harrington?"

"I was to keep my eyes open and get word to him."

When Nigel Cresswell released the Matron and the door had shut on her cropped grey hair, Sir William Nutting said:

"She's an unfortunate woman. Her husband was arrested, you know, for some business in Leicester Square. Unwisely he decided to skip the country."

"How do you know, William?"

"Oh, it came to my attention. I was able to help a little, I'm glad to say."

The next witness, Tony Picton, began by making a good impression as he confirmed the innocence of the second encounter with Mallaby. But Oliver Stephens wanted to know whether there had

been any repetition of the offence. He put his question with an intentional blunt tactlessness, using his authority to scare the boy: an authority which resided in the pale grey eyes behind rimless spectacles in a bleached, disciplined face.

"Excuse me, Warden. I'd like to ask a question. Picton, have you had intercourse with the other boy since the occasion in the dormitory, which we've heard about?"

Tony Picton made an attempt to shuffle.

"Mr. Webb laid down conditions, sir, that we weren't to have anything to do with each other in the House. We did exchange a word on one or two occasions, although it was against the rules."

"Did you have intercourse at home during this Christmas holiday?"

"Phil Mallaby came to stay."

"And did you have intercourse? I want a straight answer. You know what I mean by intercourse. Having sexual pleasure together in any form."

Oliver Stephens made it sound repulsive and caused even Picton to lose his self-possession.

"I think we did, sir."

"Thank you. That's all."

Philip Mallaby was the least articulate of Cresswell's witnesses. Under the weight of the Governing Body's disapproval he sat and blubbed in the chair at the end of the table. Oliver Stephens's directness of speech seemed to have a wounding effect on his genteel attitude, as if he were hearing the proper names of things for the first time in life. The Secretary removed him on a nod from the Warden, who explained:

"We weren't going to discover anything from that young man."

The Governors avoided one another's eyes, fearing to see the mixture of pity and distaste which each of them felt.

"Well, Mr. Cresswell," asked Lord Spooner, "have you any more people you want us to see?"

"Just the Headmaster's secretary, Miss Edith Foster, Warden."

Jordan was sent to find her, but reported after a few minutes that she had left with the Headmaster before lunch and had not been seen since.

"Was Miss Foster's evidence important for your case, Mr. Cresswell?"

"Not really, Warden. I wanted to demonstrate to the Governing Body that it was a little unusual for important letters to be written and signed by a secretary."

"I believe we take that point without further demonstration, don't we?"

The Governors muttered or nodded assent.

"I suppose we can take it that you're doing all the talking for Rodney Webb," Lord Spooner went on. "You're not intending to produce him as a witness, as well as the person making the appeal?"

Cresswell consulted briefly with Rodney.

"He's at your disposal, Warden, if you'd like him to speak for himself."

"Personally, I'd like to hear how Webb regards cases of homosexuality from his own experience as a Housemaster. Would that interest anybody else, I wonder? It seems to me that we have a conflict between the rules laid down by Adrian Massingbird, which are in line with the Founder's own views, and the more modern attitude which Dr. Haddow explained to us."

"I agree," said Mayburn. "I think it would be fair to hear Mr. Webb and then consider our finding. I'm a little nervous about the propriety of listening to legal argument on one side and nothing at all on the other, which is the position we now find ourselves in. But of course I'm in your hands, Warden."

"Thank you, Tony. Any objections, then, to our hearing Rodney Webb? Mr. Cresswell, do you agree with what has just been said?"

"Certainly. I'm sensitive on the point which Mr. Mayburn drew attention to and I waive any claim to address you further."

At the moment when Rodney was about to speak, one of the Society's servants entered and spoke first to the Secretary, John Jordan, and then to Anthony Mayburn. At once Mayburn made a gesture to stop the proceedings and turned to Lord Spooner, to whom he talked in a low tone of voice:

"It's what I was rather afraid of, Wilfred. I've very definitely been sent for and I'm afraid I can't get out of it."

"You don't have to go immediately?"

"Well, I can give it a quarter of an hour but I'm afraid that's the limit."

"We need your guidance, Tony."

"You might find it uncomfortable. At any rate I've time to listen to Webb."

Rodney, with all eyes turned on him, was able to begin:

"Warden and Governors, the last thing I want to do is give the impression of being a rebel against Godsell and its traditions. With the exception of a few years in a maintained school I've been here for the whole of my peace-time career. For fifteen years I've been a Housemaster and I think I've learnt quite a lot in the process.

"Roughly speaking, there are two sorts of homosexual offence. There's the more or less natural stage of development, which may have taken place before the boys arrive at Godsell at all. I believe at least a third of all boys are affected to the extent of having actual experiences with other boys. If that's true, it's obviously manifestly unfair to pounce on the ones who happen to get found out and who probably include the more lively members of the community. The fairest course, in my view, is to use persuasion to get the boy over the difficult stage, not subject him to an archaic ritual of punishment and humiliation. The other sort of offence is that committed by the permanent, incurable homosexual. Whether we like it or not, we're likely to have one or two of these boys in any average-sized House. The choice, once they've been identified, is between getting rid of them with a sort of brutal realism and trying to make good people out of them. I'm sure both sides can be argued with conviction, but I'm sure which side I'm on. I'm all for giving them as much of a chance as possible. I'm aware that a risk is involved, because as the Headmaster says there's a possibility of the seduction of other innocent boys. But boys aren't usually very innocent. The ones who are going to get involved in homosexual affairs are likely to do so anyway.

"Tony Picton, the boy in this case whom you've all seen and heard, is an outstanding person both in work and character. He's intelligent, mature and sensitive. I'm convinced that he'll make a useful career if he's given a proper chance. It's true that I with-

drew my confidence from him, when my understanding was that he'd let me down. As you know, I was misled by a false and to some extent malicious report from the Matron. I much regret that, but I'd ask you to believe that I was under a good deal of pressure at the time.

"As a schoolmaster, I feel much better pleased when I've sorted out a difficult case than I do over a whole lot of normal ones which give no trouble at all. And sorting out a case involves taking personal responsibility for it. To report it for punishment by somebody else involves a break of relationship and confidence, even if it's laid down in Dr. Massingbird's rules. I know from private conversations that several of my fellow Housemasters agree with me and act in the same way. So Dr. Massingbird's rules, like some of Canon Barstow's ideas, have simply been superseded in course of time. It's my opinion that they ought to be formally revoked before they begin to appear ridiculous."

Anthony Mayburn got to his feet and bent down his head towards the Warden's, while Rodney Webb stopped speaking.

"That's the one for my money," Mayburn said in an untypical colloquialism.

Before the Warden had time to reply or ask for elucidation he moved away to the door and his more important assignation. It was true to say of Mayburn that he moved rather than walked. His manner of progression was Olympian and conditioned by the foreknowledge that he would be received with deference wherever he arrived. By the same token, the place from which he had departed immediately seemed duller. Rodney Webb, who would otherwise have continued with his speech, decided instead to let well alone.

"Is that all you want to say to us?" asked the Warden.

"Yes, I think so. Of course I'd be pleased to answer any questions."

These questions fell into two broad groups: those asked by partisans and those asked by the dark horses. It was obvious that Jeremy Boddington was all for Rodney: he emanated charm and sympathy for him. Harry Levins, although more taciturn, belonged to the same encouraging group. On the other side was Sir

William Nutting, who, Rodney considered, would endorse any rule as long as it could be shown to exist and had been in force for long enough. It was at least a consolation that Richard Barstow, the Founder's great-grand-nephew, was not present since his views were even more conservative. The dark horses, on the other hand, were Dr. Hancock and Oliver Stephens. Their questions seemed deliberately framed in order not to reveal their intentions. The Warden himself never declared himself, but could be presumed to be on the side of established order if it came to the pinch.

The one tricky question came from Giles Hancock, who asked:

"Would you please name the other Housemasters who share your views about the treatment of homosexuals?"

"George Medlicott's one of them, to my certain knowledge."

"But he's no longer a Housemaster, is he?"

"No, that's true. I'm talking in a historical sense."

"Does Arthur Smith share your views?"

"No, as a matter of fact he doesn't."

"Thank you."

When the questions came to an end the Warden said:

"Mr. Cresswell, I believe the time has arrived for you to retire with your client from this hearing. If the Headmaster were still here, I'd ask him to retire as well. I think there's no object in your staying on the premises. It would be very nice if we could oblige you with a clear-cut decision on the spot, such as I'm sure you're used to in courts of law. Unfortunately we're not professionals and we'll have to do the best we can. I can assure you that the Secretary will communicate with you in writing as soon as possible."

"Might it be within twenty-four hours, Warden?"

"It might. I think it's more likely to be forty-eight."

"The matter is very immediate, Warden. My client still doesn't know whether to stay in his House or give it up."

"We all appreciate that, Mr. Cresswell, and we'll do our best for you."

"Thank you, Warden."

Nigel Cresswell collected his papers, bowed formally to the Governing Body and stood aside for Rodney Webb to precede

him. As soon as the two had left, a faintly holiday atmosphere came over the Governors. The subject of conversation was the unspeakable ghastliness of homosexuals and those talking most were Nutting, Stephens and the usually unbending Giles Hancock. To listen to them, it appeared that they were outstanding exponents of heterosexual activity. Lady Nutting or Mrs. Stephens, or even more so Mrs. Hancock, would have been amazed at the pride displayed by their menfolk in sheer virility.

"Well, now," the Warden broke in, noticing that the preliminary talk was beginning to expire, "how are we going to perform our task? My suggestion is that we should each give our opinion in reverse order of seniority as Governors. If everybody agrees"—it appeared that they did—"that's the way we'll proceed. Apart from the question of whether unfairness was shown to Rodney Webb, we have to bear in mind that our Headmaster definitely refuses to remain on the Staff with him. Any idea of a compromise, such as some of us may have been hoping for, seems to be excluded. In fact we have to weigh unfairness to Rodney Webb against the real danger of losing Cecil's services, which it may be thought we can ill afford. Is that a just description of our predicament?"

"You've put your finger on the heart of the matter," stated Nutting.

"Then let us hear Jeremy Boddington."

"I imagine it's fairly well known that I'm not an admirer of the Headmaster," said Boddington. "In the present case his conduct seems to me to be indefensible; not only reactionary but also shabby. He's even made use of a sort of blackmail in order to neutralize the appeal to us. I think we'd be unworthy of our position as Governors if we gave way an inch. I propose that we uphold Rodney Webb's appeal to confirm him in his appointment as a Housemaster—in other words that we overturn what seems to me the arbitrary decision to terminate his Housemastership. I believe it's more than likely, if we act firmly, that the Headmaster will retreat from the extreme position he's taken up. Personally, I'm all for a change in the Headmastership, but I appreciate that I'm probably alone in my opinion. As for Rodney Webb, I don't think he'll ever set any rivers on fire, but he seems to me a very

decent, competent and modern person who deserves our support."

The Warden allowed a few seconds to pass, perhaps to mark with either respect or disapproval the extraordinary nature of Boddington's views. Then he called:

"Harry Levins."

"I honestly wish I could express myself as simply and forcefully as my friend Jeremy Boddington. My own opinion is more complicated. I think Rodney Webb acted decently and humanely, but technically against the rules. I believe myself that the rules ought to be changed in the light of modern developments. Since they haven't been changed, the Headmaster was within his rights in disciplining Webb, but depriving him of his Housemastership was altogether excessive. Also the way in which the decision was imparted is open to grave censure. At a certain stage our Headmaster seems to have decided to overlook the usual courtesies. His treatment of a delegation on behalf of Webb and also of his hearing has been very high-handed. Although it's a small matter, I particularly dislike his removal of one of the witnesses without our permission. I also dislike the idea of his making his own conditions and then waiting for us to give in. At the same time it's a serious matter to replace a Headmaster and that's what we may be confronted with if we allow the appeal. I disagree with Jeremy about the prospect of Cecil retreating. I don't myself believe he's capable of compromising on this issue. Something about Rodney Webb seems to infuriate him and he's determined to win. Having said which, I still follow Jeremy's opinion and I find for Rodney Webb."

The Warden looked puzzled and asked:

"Which is the junior, Giles or Oliver?"

"I think technically I am as a matter of fact," said Oliver Stephens, "although we're more or less twins, having joined on the same date. I find myself differing rather violently from my two colleagues who have already spoken. I can't regard homosexuality as some sort of trifling ailment which can be dealt with by a quack. Nor do I subscribe to the idea about inverts, as it seems to be fashionable to call them, being just as good as the next man.

Good at what? Ballet dancing or interior decoration? I daresay they are, but they're not good at things which I've been brought up to value. Added to which, there's something inherently nasty about the whole business even if it isn't carried to the logical extreme."

Stephens looked round the table with a bleached, frosty expression at variance with the warmth of his words. The Secretary, who was keeping a tally of the votes, began to inscribe a cross to indicate "appeal rejected".

"If I were Rodney Webb," Stephens went on, "I'd have had those nancy-boys up to the Headmaster in double-quick time before they could cause any more trouble. If I'd been the Headmaster and Webb had concealed the case from me, as he did from Cecil, I'd have given him a serious piece of my mind. I wouldn't have terminated the man's Housemastership. At the same time, if Cecil thought fit, he had the right to do it. As for who signed the letter and how it was delivered, I regard that as so much fiddle-faddle.

"Now comes the point. The Headmaster comes here and he tries to dictate to us that Rodney Webb is to be sacked. That's what it comes to, because he says there isn't room at Godsell for both of them. Now, Warden, I regard that as contempt of this Body and I say the Headmaster must withdraw and come before us in all humility before we can either uphold or reject the appeal."

"You're being logical, Oliver, but are you being practical?" asked the Warden. "Surely the essence of whatever we decide is that it should go into effect immediately?"

"With respect, Warden, the essence is that our decision should be the right one."

The Warden told John Jordan, who had obliterated the cross on his paper in some degree of uncertainty:

"You'd better record Mr. Stephens'σ actual words as a separate opinion, John."

"Yes, Warden."

"And now for you, Giles."

"I don't propose to go over the whole ground again, Warden. I just want to say that I support our Headmaster, who isn't employed to keep abreast of every theory which comes along, but to run Godsell according to its own special traditions. As a scientist, I'm not unduly impressed by the claims of the psychologists. It's tempting to feel we can use their findings in the way we educate our boys, but I can assure you we need to be on much firmer ground than exists at present, before we begin throwing away a system which is tried and tested. It appears to me that Rodney Webb, in acting as he did, was playing with fire without either authority or sufficient knowledge. Our Headmaster may have been severe, but he was acting in the best interests of the School. It would be an intolerable situation if every Housemaster could introduce his own psychiatric adviser or even go into practice on his own account as an amateur. I find for the rejection of the appeal."

The Warden gained some satisfaction from seeing an uncompromising cross marked at last on the paper in front of John Jordan. William Nutting could certainly be counted on to provide another one at the cost of holding the floor for an inordinate time. The uncharitable thought caused Lord Spooner to put as much gentleness into his voice as possible in requesting:

"William, open your mind to us."

Almost immediately his own mind went blank and he could see from their expressions that the other Governors were in a similar condition. Only the Secretary, with a frown of concentration, seemed to be following every word. When Lord Spooner found himself listening again, it was with amazement that he heard the words:

"Only love, deep love, can form the basis of the Godsellite Society. Our special sort of love has an ascending order, at the summit of which stands the Headmaster. His services to us are literally priceless and we can only repay them by faith in him."

"Do I understand, William," asked the Warden when it was clear from the silence that Nutting had reached the end of his contribution, "that you reject the appeal?"

"Certainly, Warden."

Another cross went down on the Secretary's paper and it almost appeared as if the hearing might produce a clear-cut decision. Lord Spooner considered for a moment and then began to speak in his turn:

"Much of what I'd like to say has been said already, on both sides. Undoubtedly there have been faults on the part of the Headmaster, but I would like to describe them as a collection of small faults. Behind them lies the larger question of the treatment of homosexual offences, on which he feels deeply, standing as he does in the direct line of the Founder and Adrian Massingbird. Whatever we think ourselves, we can hardly repudiate the tradition of the School which we are here to govern.

"Cecil has shown himself intolerant of opposition and this confronts us with the real problem of Rodney Webb's future. It's a problem, as I say, but it isn't by any means insoluble. If Rodney Webb leaves Godsell, I'm confident that he'll be welcomed elsewhere on his merits. Some of us may be able to assist him in a judicious manner. Surely that's a more sensible policy than trying to persuade Cecil to go back on his word, as Oliver wants us to do. As I see it, we're threatened by the division of the School and the loss of our Headmaster, all because of a wretched affair between a couple of boys. I say our duty is to save Godsell and I cast my vote for the rejection of the appeal."

After a silence, during which he was waiting apprehensively for a counter-attack, the Warden asked:

"How do we stand, John?"

"For upholding the appeal, two votes," reported the Secretary. "For the rejection of the appeal, three votes. For the withdrawal by the Headmaster of a contempt of the Governing Body, before any decision on the appeal is made, one vote."

"Thank you, John. I think that gives us enough to go on."

"What about Tony Mayburn, Warden?" asked Boddington.

Lord Spooner's heart sank, but he made an attempt to carry the matter off.

"Tony left us," he said, "before the vote was taken."

"Yes, indeed. I just thought he might have given some indication which side he was on."

Anthony Mayburn's whispered words had all but passed out of the Warden's mind, but now they recurred to him with a remarkable clarity:

"That's the one for my money."

18

BEGINNING OF TERM

THE first boys who collected round the School notice-board early on Wednesday evening, when term-time began, found an item more interesting than any which they could have expected. On the evidence of its dating, this notice had just been put on display. It read:

> "The Governing Body of Godsell School held an extraordinary meeting on Saturday, January 14th, in London to consider an appeal by Rodney Webb, Esq., M.A., against a decision of the Headmaster to terminate his appointment as a Housemaster. The Governing Body rejected the appeal and gave its full support to the Headmaster's action. Mr. Webb will in consequence be leaving Godsell School in the immediate future.
>
> "John Jordan, Secretary of the Governing Body"

The knot of boys quickly thickened as those who had read the notice called out to others. There was a subdued excitement, although most of the spectators only gazed stolidly at the white rectangle of card with its intimidating *Noli Peccare* crest at the top. For the moment, there was no comment on the rights or wrongs of the case. All that was said was in the interrogative form:

"Have you seen this about the Webber?"

Rodney Webb himself, having already heard about the rejection of his appeal from Cresswell, received a letter signed by the Headmaster on the same evening on which the notice was displayed on the board. It told him that he was to leave his House without delay, so that the new Housemaster Captain Meadows could move in. The accommodation in Carlton Close was still available, but the Bursar had been informed that the tenancy should not be extended beyond a period of three months from the time of writing.

"It has been thought fit," the letter went on, "that your association with Godsell should come to a close as soon as this can be conveniently arranged."

On the tail of the letter Alec Meadows arrived on the door-step of Webb's with his wife, who had the look of a woman long starved of privilege.

"Sorry to barge in like this," Meadows apologized, "but I was wondering when Rita could start moving her things."

"Yes, I'd like to look round if I may and take a few measurements," the wife put in.

"Certainly," said Rodney with an effort at cordiality. "I'm sure Maud will want to help you."

"I'm sure."

"As far as I'm concerned," Alec Meadows continued, "I can make do for a couple of days with a corner of your study."

"How d'you mean, exactly?"

"Well, I've just been with the Headmaster and he wants me to take effective charge of the House from the beginning of term."

"But this *is* the beginning of term."

"Precisely, old boy. Hence my rudeness in calling round and banging on your door."

"I've only just had this letter," Rodney explained, showing it.

"Yes, but with respect Cecil asked you to leave some time ago, didn't he?"

"The question was frozen pending my appeal to the Governing Body."

"Well, now Cecil wants a quick change-over."

"Yes, I see."

Godfrey Norman's car stopped at the kerb beneath them as this dialogue took place. His son Ralph carried some luggage into the boys' entrance.

"Hullo, Rodney," the father asked, coming up the steps, "you've heard, have you?"

"Cecil's kicking me out and putting Alec Meadows in as Housemaster from this moment, apparently."

"I'm sure that would be a mistake."

"It's Cecil's orders."

"Cecil's orders may not have quite the weight he still thinks they have. Shall we go inside? You as well, Captain Meadows, if you like. The clearer the situation is made to everybody, the better it's likely to turn out."

They all filed into the study and the two masters sat down at Norman's request while he himself walked up and down in the restricted space.

"This so-called decision of the Governing Body's a mistake as far as I can gather," he explained.

"How d'you mean? How can it possibly be a mistake?" Meadows asked with some heat. "The Governing Body's had a meeting and the Secretary's announced its decision. What can possibly be wrong with that?"

Godfrey Norman gave him an appraising look, which was still unsympathetic.

"It's important to you, Meadows, I know," he said, "and from your point of view it's damned bad luck if your appointment doesn't go through. But some of us think or know that there's been unfairness to Rodney Webb."

"But if the Warden and Governors have decided—"

"The Warden's in Italy. William Nutting persuaded him to go off on holiday before the report was written or the decision announced. Nutting and Jordan were the authors and they seem to have misrepresented the Governing Body's views."

"Who's your informant?" asked Rodney.

"Oliver Stephens is a good friend of mine, even if I don't invariably see eye to eye with him. I've got the details right, I assure you. Oliver's been in touch with Tony Mayburn, who's indignant about the whole procedure."

"And what's Mayburn going to do about it?"

"I don't know. I've just had a word with him and for obvious reasons he wasn't very communicative, but he's bound to act quickly to stop anything foolish happening."

"I've more or less made up my mind to leave," said Rodney, "if you call that something foolish."

"You'll change your mind, now, of course."

"I'm not sure I will. I don't really see much of a future for me at Godsell."

As he said the words, Rodney's voice wavered and he had to harden himself against the self-pity which he felt welling up inside him.

"Good Heavens, man, where d'you think of going?"

"I've had the offer of a job from Paul Arkwright, the Chief Education Officer for the county."

"As Assistant, you mean?"

"Yes."

"But that would be a big drop in salary, wouldn't it? About £500 a year?"

"I dare say."

Embarrassed, Alec Meadows got to his feet and said:

"I think Rita and I ought to be getting along."

When the Meadowses had gone, Godfrey Norman said to Rodney:

"If I were you, I'd pass on what I've told you to your lawyer. He ought to contest the decision and insist on another meeting under the Warden."

At Sir William Nutting's flat in South Kensington, Mayburn was making the same point. He had called by appointment and rather curtly refused a drink when it was offered.

"You seem upset, Tony," said Nutting nervously.

"I'd like to ask you a number of questions, William. Then I'll know whether I'm entitled to be upset or not."

"Very well, then."

"First of all, did the Warden indicate to you or the Governing Body what my opinion was on the appeal?"

"Not a word, Tony. I had no idea you'd even given an opinion."

"Secondly, who suggested that the Warden should go abroad before the report was drafted?"

"I'm afraid I must plead guilty, Tony. I was sure I could manage with John Jordan's help and Wilfred badly needed a rest and a change of air."

"I see. Let me come to my third question, which is the crucial one, I'm afraid. May I ask what action you took on Oliver

Stephens's recommendation that Cecil should withdraw his demand for Rodney Webb to leave the School?"

"What action, Tony? I put the matter to Cecil in person and he refused point-blank, as I knew he would."

"And did it occur to you that in that case Oliver would uphold the appeal, on the grounds that Cecil was showing contempt for the Governing Body?"

"In all sincerity, Tony," said Nutting, "I took the Headmaster's refusal as terminating Oliver's idea of a solution. It left the voting at three to two for rejection of the appeal."

"So you drafted the report accordingly."

"We did indeed, and circulated it to the members, as you're aware. At the same time, since the matter was one of urgency, a notice was displayed on the School notice-board."

"And who composed the notice?"

Nutting licked his dry lips, wondering exactly how much to reveal.

"Did Cecil have a hand in composing the notice?" Mayburn asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact he did. He was rather insistent about there being a notice and I gave him and Jordan the necessary authority over the telephone. I hope there was nothing wrong in that, Tony."

"I'm afraid there was something gravely wrong," Mayburn said inexorably. "According to the notice, 'Mr. Webb will be leaving Godsell School in the immediate future.' That's a total misrepresentation, don't you agree? Not only was the Governing Body as a whole dismayed by Cecil's insistence on Webb leaving, Oliver Stephens chose to make a special issue out of it. And yet this notice has gone up on the board. Let me ask you one more question, William."

"Just one more, if you like."

"Did Cecil specifically clear the wording of the notice, including that sentence, with you?"

"No, Tony, he didn't. I really think now that he went too far."

"I'm damned sure he went too far," said Mayburn. "At any moment we'll have Nigel Cresswell breathing down our necks."

"But how will he know?"

"Because somebody will tell him: Rodney Webb, for instance. How d'you think *I* know? A notice on the School notice-board isn't going to remain secret for very long."

"No, indeed. I see that, Tony. So in your view, perhaps, the notice should be taken down or replaced?"

"I think it should be replaced. A new notice should be displayed, making it clear that the Governing Body was divided in opinion and that the previous notice was displayed in error. It should state that a further meeting of the Governing Body will be held within the next few days."

"But can it be, with our Warden in Italy?"

"I'm afraid our Warden will have to come back from Italy. This is a crisis in the life of Godsell, William."

"But what about the Headmaster, Tony? I'm sure he won't accept any alteration in the notice. It will be like a slap in the face for him."

"I expect you're right. I'm sure we have to be prepared for Cecil Dormer-Wills's resignation."

"But who could take charge, Tony? The new term's already begun."

"That's a matter for the Governing Body to decide. In the mean time, if Cecil walks out, there's no alternative but for the Master in College to take over."

"H.B. Ellice?" asked Nutting. "Is that really a possibility?"

"It's the only possibility, for a few days at any rate, and then the Governing Body will make its decision. Nothing much can happen in a few days."

"It looks," Nutting said ruefully, "as if I shall have my hands full. I have to get the notice changed, try and prevent Cecil from resigning, persuade the Warden to give up his holiday and fix a new meeting of the Governing Body. Is that the lot?"

For the first time in the interview Anthony Mayburn smiled. He exerted a charm which was as powerful in its way as the menace which he had hitherto been propagating.

"That's the lot," he agreed, "if you listen to my advice. I'm the one who's to blame, really, because I ran away from the hearing just when I might have been useful."

"That was what the Warden felt. He was relying on you, Tony."

As long as Anthony Mayburn was with him in the flat, it seemed to Nutting reasonably easy to carry out the tasks which had been appointed. But once he was alone he could envisage all too clearly the difficulties involved. He feared especially to be the person who would set the telephone ringing in the courtyard at Godsell. At last he compromised. He rang, but when he was connected he said:

"Cecil, it's William. I'm coming down to see you and I'd like a bed, if that can be arranged. My chauffeur, too."

"Of course, William. Will you want food?"

"Just a sandwich and a glass of whisky."

It was almost three hours from door to door and the clock on the Town Hall was showing ten minutes past ten when the car slowed down for the turning out of the High Street. Nutting put away the note-book in which he had been writing and switched off the interior light of the car. He needed a few moments of repose and thought before confronting his old friend.

In College Lane lights were showing in many of the windows, but the Headmaster's house seemed dead. At the sound of the bell, however, a glow shone out from a fan-light and Bellows opened the door with the nearest approach to a smile of which he was still capable.

"I stayed in for you, Sir William," he said, "to make sure you knew where we'd put you. I'll take up your bag before I go. It's the Goldfinch Room."

Sir William was touched by the old servant's solicitude, which made him feel like a well-loved boy returning home. The Goldfinch Room, named after the second Headmaster, was where the books were kept which he liked to read at night.

"Thank you, Bellows. Is the Headmaster in the study? Then I'll go straight in."

Even in the study it was dark, but a movement betrayed where Cecil Dormer-Wills was sitting looking out at the courtyard through the big window. Nutting called out:

"Don't move, Cecil. I'll come and join you there. I can see my way."

When he had reached a chair Bellows closed the door and cut off the shaft of light from the door. The two men sat quietly together for a few moments and then Dormer-Wills said:

"You've got bad news for me, haven't you?"

"Fairly bad, Cecil. That's why I thought I'd come down personally. I thought it might help a little."

He explained in detail the demands made by Anthony Mayburn. Dormer-Wills said nothing until the question of the notice on the board was tactfully raised.

"How can it possibly be changed?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact I've written out the wording of a new notice. I did it in the car. I hope you'll find it acceptable."

The Headmaster switched on the light beside him by tugging at a short chain. Sir William leaned forward and proffered his open note-book.

"It's ridiculous, William," the Headmaster said. "You know as well as I do that a school has to be run with a smack of authority. It isn't like a court-room where all the arguments can be set against one another, and the final verdict quite possibly overruled. Mayburn has to be made to understand, that's all."

"The other notice has only just been put up."

"But there's been a crowd of boys round it all the evening. I could see them from here."

"Was that why you were sitting in the dark?"

"Yes, to begin with. Afterwards I was just sitting and thinking, I'm afraid."

Sir William, with the intuition which he possessed where his friend was concerned, understood that the Headmaster had been savouring the victory over Rodney Webb represented by the notice. The notice would have gradually become ineffaceable as the groups of boys visible from the darkened study window replaced one another.

"How do you see your position?" Nutting asked gently.

"It isn't the end of the story, William. Not by any means. The Governing Body was short of one member at the extraordinary meeting. Dick Barstow. He was coming out of hospital this afternoon."

"You mean, at a new meeting he'll be present and he'll be for rejection of the appeal. If we count Oliver Stephens as an upholder, that still won't be decisive, Cecil, I'm sorry to say."

"Explain to me exactly about Oliver's point of view."

The Headmaster listened carefully to Nutting's account.

"Then possibly what I should do," he said, "is withdraw my insistence on Webb leaving the Staff. It makes no odds, because he's bound to leave after what's happened, whether I insist or not."

Sir William was slightly appalled at the opportunism of his friend's words, but also admiring the rapid grasp of the situation which was characteristic.

"Yes," he admitted. "If you withdraw what Oliver calls your contempt, according to his own declaration he's bound to change sides and vote for rejection of the appeal."

"And that means we win after all."

"Yes, indeed. Without revealing the exact course of the voting–"

"It will be five to three for rejection," said Dormer-Wills. "Mayburn can put in a minority report with Levins and Boddington, but that's as far as he can go."

There was a note of brittle triumph in Cecil Dormer-Wills's voice which made Sir William even more uneasy.

"There's still the question of the notice," he pointed out. "I'll have to instruct John Jordan to replace it."

"Leave it to me, William. I'll deal with the notice."

"But what will you do?"

"We'll take it down for the time being. It can go up again when the position's clarified. The important thing now is to persuade the Warden to come back from Italy."

"I'll telephone him in the morning, Cecil."

"Yes, it's too late now. You must have your sandwiches, William, and a glass of whisky, and then we'll go to bed."

Over a similar nightcap in George Medlicott's house, an intimate company including the Webbs was listening to Fatty Carpindale's assessment of the Headmaster's sanity.

"From the account that Juliet's given me," said Fatty, "I believe he's going off his chump."

"What's happened now?"

"It's worrying for me, not only as a father but as a clergyman. You know they have long talks together and often Cecil reads to her. Well, lately his choice of reading matter seems to have got more and more eccentric. I mean, technically it's still in the religious field but you know what some of the mystic poets are like. And he keeps mentioning an escape, as if he and Juliet were actually going to go off together on some kind of dreamlike voyage."

"Oughtn't something to be said about it?" suggested Maud.

"Oh, it's all too tentative and high-minded for that. Besides, one doesn't want to expose Juliet to questioning of any sort. It's only because of being in her confidence that one knows about it all."

"Yes, I see that."

"All the same, I'm thinking of sending Juliet to stay with her aunt in Maidstone until things have blown over. I certainly would do, if she wasn't just going back to school."

"But is he really crazy?" asked Maud. "If so, it seems monstrous that Rodney should have to pay for it. Can't anything be done?"

Rodney Webb felt disenchanted with all the efforts being made on his behalf and even with Maud's indignation. He felt the need to be alone. Slipping out of the room, he left the house and crossed over obliquely to the wall of the cemetery. Once he had been certain of his bones ending up there, but through little fault of his own the continuity had been broken. Now he was only interested in making a new start. The task might be beyond his capacity, but it was what he was determined to attempt and he had no wish to be distracted.

From where he stood at the corner he could see a light shining between the curtains high up in the Warden's house. The thought crossed his mind that one of the Governors was in residence and, if some magic had permitted him to look in at the window, he

would have shown no surprise at the spectacle of Sir William Nutting turning the pages of *Johnny Crow's Garden*.

"Rodney! Rodney!" came the sound of Maud's voice in the frozen darkness.

19

THE RESTORATION

SIR William Nutting picked up the telephone on the next morning with a feeling of reasonable certainty that he could persuade the Warden to return. He was astonished by the difficulty which he encountered. It would have been easier for him if Lord Spooner had relied on any single reason. But the Warden spoke about a strike in the Italian transport industry, a disagreeable low fever which was troubling him and a niece coming out to stay in Italy. As soon as Sir William succeeded in overcoming one argument, he found himself confronted with another. The only reasonable inference was that Lord Spooner, having made his escape from the scene of action, had no intention whatever of returning. He expressed full confidence in Nutting, whom he described as abler than himself in finding a way through diplomatic tangles.

Thus Sir William entered the dining-room, where Cecil Dormer-Wills was at breakfast, with nothing of a positive or encouraging nature to report. In a few lame words he attempted to explain his failure, but was met by the Headmaster with a frigid gloom which went beyond any reaction which he had expected. Seeking an explanation, he noticed that The Times was open on the table at the page on which the obituaries were printed. Under a long review of the career of a General and a shorter one of a Civil Servant's was a paragraph headed "The Rev Richard Barstow".

"Good God, Cecil," he said, hardly yet grasping the consequences, "Dick Barstow's gone."

"Yes, according to the news he died suddenly while he was waiting to be fetched from the hospital."

Nutting picked up the paper in a forlorn hope that the paragraph might refer to a similarly named but different person. The identification, however, was absolute. Barstow was "the great-grand-nephew of the Founder of Godsell School." In earlier days he had been "a prolific writer upon religious subjects and the

author of a popular volume of *Lenten Thoughts*." "In spite of failing health" he had "never stinted his work as a member of Godsell's Governing Body."

"It's unthinkable," Nutting said, unconsciously adopting the same style. "The last link with the Founder's been broken."

He sat down at the table and poured out coffee and milk, feeling the need of the warm fluid. Cecil Dormer-Wills, meanwhile, remained silent in order to allow the other's grief to take its course. Then he said:

"Together with what you tell me about the Warden, this makes my own position untenable. My first thought is that I should resign."

"But that's totally uncalled for, Cecil. The Governing Body has to be given the chance of supporting you, or confirming its support."

"While it's doing that I should be the laughing-stock of the whole School."

"There won't be any delay. Wilfred Spooner authorized me to convene another meeting as Vice-Warden—"

"—where the voting will go against me. In preparation for that I intend to leave Godsell and take up a neutral stance. I prefer to avoid being humiliated in front of my own Staff."

"How d'you mean, Cecil? Where will you go?"

"To Esher, to my mother's, if you want to know."

"But term's just begun. Who's going to run the School?"

"Perhaps that's something the Governing Body should have thought of, before questioning my authority. At any rate I shall be available when Anthony Mayburn and some others come to their senses."

The Headmaster stood up, leaving his breakfast almost untasted. His lack of stature, as always, made the movement seem unimportant and even pathetic. It was the set expression of his face which gave him his authority.

"Cecil, I implore you to think again."

"I've thought quite sufficiently, William. I'm grateful for your own support but the fact of the matter is that I've been let down.

It isn't too late to rectify the situation, but unfortunately the decision doesn't lie with me any more."

"Somebody's got to be in charge, Cecil, until you come back."

"Well, then, why not H.B.?"

Nutting was distressed by the mere idea. H.B. Ellice had somehow hung on to his post as Master in College, to which he had succeeded rather late, until extreme old age. His special blend of scholarly distinction, pathos and obstinacy had saved him from retirement on a number of occasions, but it was now conceded by everybody that he was at the end of the road. Deaf and wandering in his thoughts, and even slightly mad, he could be of less than no use in any emergency.

But the Headmaster, having made his suggestion, did not wait for the obvious answer that there were many good reasons for dispensing with H.B. He asked Edith Foster to order the Humber and went up to his bedroom to pack his clothes and some favourite books. Although he did not admit as much to himself, his recommendation had been largely mischievous. In his state of indignation with the Mayburn caucus of the Governing Body, he was driven to act as damagingly as possible so that his own merits would shine forth in the resulting confusion. But it would have been untypical of him not to be aware that he was also acting in accordance with the letter of the School's constitution, which placed the Master in College second in the hierarchy.

Bellows, warned by Edith, came up to the bedroom to collect his bags and Edith herself was hovering with Sir William Nutting in the hall. It gave him pleasure to see his departure regretted and yet appear unmoved. Once in the car, he was about to give the address in Esher when he remembered Juliet Carpindale, whose regret above all others he would like to have earned. Her father would presumably be in Chapel preparing for the first service of term.

This was not the case. When the Headmaster rapped with the knocker at No. 6, the door was opened by Fatty himself, who was on the point of leaving. Dormer-Wills, conscious all at once of the ambiguity of his mission, said with a shade of pomposity:

"I'd like a word with Juliet if I may, Hubert."

The chauffeur and the waiting car made Fatty Carpindale feel uneasy. He could hardly imagine what his Headmaster and Ordinary could be up to, but he could think of no grounds for refusing.

"Yes, of course. In here," he said, opening the door into the dining-room. "She doesn't start school till to-morrow."

Fatty stood close beside the door, which he kept ajar, and heard Dormer-Wills begin:

"Julie, my dear, I wanted to come and say good-bye—"

The voice was cut off as the door was pushed shut from inside, grazing Fatty's forehead. He was deeply ashamed at the implied rebuke for his eavesdropping. Being overdue already in Chapel, he felt that he had no option but to set out and leave the others at their *tête-à-tête* although passing the car could not fail to remind of the peculiarity of the situation. It was in Chapel, in the middle of the special prayer for Godsell, that the thought occurred to him: Cecil is running away. Fears awoke in him, which he tried to put away out of his imagination. Seeking any sign of the unusual, he noticed that H.B. Ellice, who invariably occupied the end position on the opposite side of the choir, was absent.

In fact Sir William had caught H.B. within a few minutes of Cecil Dormer-Wills's departure. With difficulty he persuaded the prophet-like old gentleman, with his hooked nose and hair like white wool, that Chapel was not on this particular day of the highest importance. In the study he shouted into H.B.'s cupped hand:

"I'm acting as Warden and I'd like you to take over for the time being as Headmaster."

In order to make sure that the message was absorbed, Sir William had to simplify it more and more. All he succeeded finally in imparting was that H.B. was Headmaster. A crazy pride filled the old man at this news, driving him to show himself off in the Masters' Common Room and under Barstow Hall, where a number of boys had collected to read the notices.

"I'm your Headmaster now. Dr. Dormer-Wills has gone," he announced.

"What about this notice, sir?" asked Tony Picton, who was one of the group.

"Let me see. It doesn't mean anything."

"Can I take it down, sir?"

"Yes, take it down. I'll put up another notice."

"Can I write it for you, sir? What about a holiday for the whole School, to celebrate the occasion?"

In spite of his euphoria H.B. became dubious at the request. "I don't know about a holiday, boy," he said, "at the beginning of term."

"It's always done by a new Headmaster, sir. Dr. Dormer-Wills gave a holiday." Tony turned round and appealed to the other boys: "Didn't he? It's always done."

There was a chorus of agreement.

"If it's always done I'll do it," promised H.B.

"Let me write the notice for you, sir. I'll do it on the back of this card."

Tony wrote: "I take pleasure in granting a whole holiday to Godsell on the occasion of my assuming the Headmastership." He put the date, January 19th, at the bottom. "Look, sign it here, sir."

H.B. still hesitated, but the boys cheered him on. The number round him doubled while he was fumbling with the ball-point pen. At last he signed his name and wrote "Headmaster" after it. Tony Picton seized the card and tacked it high up on the board. There was applause and a few boys tried to chair H.B., but he broke away from them and retreated across the grass towards his new official residence, where Nutting stood glumly watching at the study window.

The news of the holiday spread with extraordinary speed. By the time when the masters appeared to take their first periods the boys were fading away across the playing-fields and along every passage which led towards freedom. George Medlicott was the first person in authority to read the new notice. At first glance he assumed it to be a hoax, but on inspection H.B. Ellice's wavering handwriting could be seen to be genuine. He called to Arthur Smith, who volunteered to go and see whether H.B. had really installed himself in the Headmaster's house. He himself went to

his own class-room, but as he expected not a soul was in attendance. Emerging, he saw that some masters were now gathered round the notice-board and discussing the new development. They did not include anybody in whose speculations he would be interested, such as Fatty Carpindale, and on an impulse he decided to walk round to Fatty's house.

From the front hall, when he was admitted, he could hear the sound of a girl's sobbing.

"Who's that? Juliet?" he asked.

"Yes, George, it's rather a strange story," Fatty whispered. "Cecil came to say good-bye to her."

"He's really gone, then?"

"I assume so. He had his car outside."

"And what's the matter with Juliet?"

"She won't tell me. She just says Cecil held her hand and talked to her and she couldn't help bursting into tears."

"I'm sure she'll cheer up before long."

"She seems inconsolable and I'm wondering what Cecil could possibly have told her. He said nothing to me, except to ask where she was, and then he shut the door of the dining-room in my face."

While they stood together in the hall, with Juliet's sobs continuing in the background, the front door-bell sounded. Fatty opened up and the Webbs, Rodney and Maud, were discovered on the pavement. Their car, loaded to the roof, was behind them.

"This is splendid," Rodney said with artificial gaiety. "We're able to kill two birds with one stone. We've made up our minds to leave immediately and you're the only people we intend to say good-bye to."

"You can't leave, Rodney," George Medlicott told him. "Cecil's thrown up the sponge. You've only got to hold on for a day or two and you've won."

"Curiously enough, I'm not interested in winning any more."

"Oh, nonsense, Rodney."

"It's too late to argue with me. I've handed over to Alec Meadows, who's anxious for the succession. Now I'm off to my new job. All I want is for you to wish me luck."

The distraction of Juliet's weeping had ceased, enabling Fatty to concentrate on the matter in hand.

"Are you sure you're not just making a gesture, Rodney?" he asked. "Maud will know. Is he making a gesture, Maud, or does he mean it? If he cares about Godsell, he's going to break his heart away from it, isn't he?"

"I'm sure he means it, Fatty. We talked about it almost all night. He's determined to go."

"Yes, I'm afraid I've made up my mind."

Rodney extended his hand for his two friends to shake. The affectation of gaiety had evaporated and his face looked pinched and miserable. He turned hurriedly away. George Medlicott opened the car door for Maud with his manner of a well-trained actor. Rodney slipped into his own seat and in a few moments the car had turned the sharp corner out of College Lane.

"We have to get him back," said Fatty. "Don't you agree, George, that we have to get him back?"

"I do, but for the time being H.B.'s in charge of the School. He's declared a holiday and all formal discipline seems to have come to an end. It's hardly the moment to put forward our case."

By the operation of some form of herd instinct, many of the boys leaving the School buildings headed by various paths for White Horse Down. Tony Picton, regarded as a hero because of his appeal to H.B. Ellice, was among the leaders. He was surrounded by others who were eager to respond to any initiative and it was all this unspoken provocation which made him suggest:

"What d'you say to giving the white horse a stand again?"

"How d'you mean, Tony?"

"I mean dig out the design as it used to be, before old Barstow insisted on castrating it."

"Marvellous, Tony!"

A sense of power lifted him up the zig-zag path without any sense of fatigue. He guessed that a padlocked shack close to the ascent would contain tools for cleaning the chalk lines. The lock was quickly sprung open by a blow with a stone and the tools extracted. So great was the eagerness which had been generated that the boys ran rather than walked to the wire fence surrounding

the horse. Inside, at the centre of the design, faint traces indicated where they needed to carry out their task of stripping off the turf and revealing the white chalk underneath.

Tony Picton, looking down the tilt of the hill at the little groups climbing up the path, at the panorama of playing-fields and School buildings across the railway and the town itself beyond, saw himself as an impresario on the grandest scale, called to celebrate the conviction of the importance of honesty and the hypocrisy of prudence and concealment. His friends scraping at the grassy slope were preparing a theatrical sensation which would be visible for miles around.

By now a score of other boys had arrived. They were spectators, uncertain what attitude to adopt, until a College monitor named Crosthwaite stepped forward and asked:

"What do you fellows imagine you're doing?"

There was no answer but the scrape of the tools.

"I order you to stop immediately."

Nobody paid any attention and the work continued. "All right. I'll see that the matter's reported."

The monitor set off downhill and a sense of the feebleness of his mission, compared with the peremptory command which had been ignored, set the spectators laughing and put them on the side of Tony Picton. Meanwhile the manual work had achieved its result and the horse began to stand forth in its original image. The diggers relaxed, leaning on their tools.

A long way below, Frank Pooley looked up and was possibly the first person to witness the revelation in perspective. Soon afterwards he entered a telephone box and rang up Sylvia.

"Hullo, darling."

"Hullo, Frank, I was just thinking about you. I was hoping you'd ring."

"We've got a holiday. It's too long to explain, but it's rather a chance of getting together."

"You can come here if you like. Mum and Dad won't be home till late."

"All right, I'll come straight away, darling. You know the white horse where we went with Gavin and Doreen? Well, some boys

have restored it to what it used to be. You'd be amazed, Sylvia, if you could see it. It isn't exactly shocking. It seems natural, if you know what I mean."

"Come as soon as you like, Frank."

"Yes, I'm on my way."

Frank had no idea who was responsible for the spade-work on the Downs. He would have liked to go up there and make common cause, for he thought he recognized the spirit of the expelled Gavin. But the prospect of finding Sylvia alone and willing drove every other motive out of his head. His knees were weak, so that he could hardly run for a bus, and he could feel his insides turning to water. In ten minutes, he told himself, he would be at the door of the house and all his life had been a preparation for that moment.

While the local bus was rolling along the unimpressive stretch of riband development towards the stop at the Rendezvous Café, Crosthwaite arrived out of breath at the Headmaster's house and gasped out his story to H.B. Ellice and Arthur Smith. H.B. cupped his hand to his ear and nodded repeatedly, but it was difficult for him to catch the monitor's words. Arthur Smith suffered under no such handicap. It was at once clear to him what needed to be done.

"Leave this to me, H.B.," he shouted.

All the same, he was cautious enough to hail Alec Meadows in the courtyard and solicit his company. The two of them were regular walkers, to whom the ascent of White Horse Down was simply a diversion. As they emerged on to the playing-fields Arthur Smith raised his eyes and, in spite of the message brought by Crosthwaite, could hardly believe what they registered. The horse in its modern and castrated form had adorned dozens of tourist posters and conveyed an impression of staleness and familiarity. But the amateurish spadework of a few boys had converted it back into something ancient, soaring and powerful. There could be no mistaking the genius of the artist, who had used exaggeration with such extraordinary effect.

"Good God, Alec!" said Arthur Smith.

The potency of it scared him and made him quicken his pace. Every minute of exposure, until the turf could be replaced, might be expected to increase the moral danger in his opinion.

"What's our best course of action, d'you think?" he asked.

"Cut out the ringleader and make an example of him," suggested Captain Meadows.

"Yes, good idea."

But Tony Picton, having encouraged his helpers to return their tools to the shack, was already taking avoiding action. His course took him along a shoulder of downland, down a steep cutting on to the railway line and round by the back of the cemetery to Webb's. With exemplary coolness he packed his suitcase in the dormitory and carried it downstairs. His nerve was almost shaken when Peter Dawson, a monitor, crossed the landing in front of him and entered another boy's study to be received with a roar of welcome. Unchallenged, Tony Picton succeeded in reaching the pavement and turning towards the railway station. He had timed his movements with considerable precision. Fifteen minutes later he was seated in a train with a small cigar tilted elegantly between his teeth, on his way home to Maidenhead. He had no particular regrets, being aware that his chances at Godsell had expired with the departure of Rodney Webb. There was no room for him in Captain Meadows's world.

20

SLOW THROUGH GODSELL

THE Governing Body met again on the day on which Richard Barstow's funeral was to take place. The old clergyman's remains, by his own wish, were to be buried in the close of the mock-Gothic Chapel and H.B. Ellice had told Sir William Nutting that he would make himself responsible for the arrangements.

"Isn't that a mistake," asked Jeremy Boddington in his most supercilious manner, "in view of his known deficiencies?"

"I'm damned sure it's a mistake," Oliver Stephens agreed.

They took their places round the oak table in Goldfinch Annexe, as the room at the end of Barstow Hall was called. Since Lord Spooner had not returned from Italy, Sir William Nutting was in the chair. With an air of resignation he picked up the Agenda which John Jordan, the Secretary, had prepared.

"'Mr. Oliver Stephens'," he read out. "'Complaint against the report on the appeal by Rodney Webb, heard at the extraordinary meeting on January 14th.' Will you speak to that, Oliver?"

"Yes. I decline to accept the report on the grounds that it misrepresents the balance of opinion in the Governing Body."

"You all have the report in front of you," said Sir William to the table. "Does anyone else decline to accept it?"

"Yes," answered Mayburn after a pause. "As a matter of fact I believe Oliver would like me to speak for both of us. I anticipated that the Headmaster would be here to answer for his own part in the matter, but I understand he's left his post as some kind of protest against ourselves. Is that right, William?"

"Yes, indeed. He's under the impression, rightly or wrongly, that he's been let down. He's gone to stay at Esher with his mother and stepfather, Mr. and Mrs. Harman. He's prepared to come back if the Governing Body accepts his terms."

"My own strong suggestion is that the Governing Body should do nothing of the kind," said Mayburn and went on to put the case which he had already expounded by way of question and answer to Sir William.

"Is it your view," asked Nutting at the end of this, looking shaken and dispirited, "that a new report is called for?"

"Yes, it is. Oliver Stephens's condition hasn't been met and that means, as I understand him, that he'll uphold the appeal."

"Certainly," said Stephens.

"But the Warden isn't here and he was for rejection."

"I suggest, Vice-Warden, that you take the votes of those present and then see if the Warden's vote would make any difference."

"Very well, then, if that's the general feeling, who is for rejection of Rodney Webb's appeal?"

"I am," put in Dr. Hancock at once.

"And so am I," said Nutting after some silent moments, "but the rest of you evidently uphold the appeal, which makes the voting four to two. Is that so?"

There were affirmative mutters.

"If I may step in here," said Anthony Mayburn, "I'd like to draw attention to some important consequences of our reversing what purported to be our decision. A wrong has been done to Rodney Webb, who has quite reasonably taken a job elsewhere. I understand that he's gone to work at the County Education Authority. If you accept my recommendation, one or more of us, preferably including you, William, should go and offer Webb immediate reinstatement and clearing of his name by a public statement. That means, of course, if he accepts, that Meadows's appointment should be revoked, which will need tactful handling and possibly a promise of the next vacancy.

"Now comes the matter of the Headmastership. Let me say plainly that Cecil Dormer-Wills has forfeited our trust and support and has also left his post without any acceptable reason, with the result that there's been disorder which has got into the Press and discredited the School, besides undermining discipline. The price of getting him back, so we're told, is to capitulate to his demands, which we've decided against. So our deputation, William, will have to go and procure his resignation. But before that we need to know who we're going to get instead.

"H.B. Ellice is by no manner of means a possible substitute, or we'd have asked him to this meeting. It's generally agreed that he should have been retired years ago. There's therefore an absolute necessity for a first-class man to be appointed as Headmaster in place of Cecil Dormer-Wills. In the nature of things it can't be an outsider. It would take weeks or months before the necessary soundings could be made. Therefore it has to be an insider. It's up to us to choose the right one among the limited number of possibles. As a Governing Body, that's our bounden duty."

"Really, Tony," said Nutting, "you appal me. You absolutely appal me."

"Do you mean you don't agree with my reasoning?"

"No, I think you put your case very well. It's just that I shrink from the consequences. I can't believe it can be right to throw our Headmaster over."

"He's thrown himself over, William. We have no option, as the body in ultimate charge of the School, but to choose a successor."

"I agree with that," put in Harry Levins.

"So do I," added Boddington.

Since nothing was said on the other side, Sir William Nutting took it upon himself to point out:

"We're being asked to do a job which we were never constituted for. It's not our function to be familiar with the merits and demerits of members of the Staff."

"But it's our function to choose the Headmaster," said Mayburn.

For some time John Jordan, the Secretary, had been trying to attract attention. Now he displayed the face of his watch and announced:

"It's time for the funeral, gentlemen."

The Governors emerged from Barstow Hall in the comfortable assurance that everything would have been prepared for them. A deadly stillness, however, enshrouded the School buildings. The giant elms lifted their branches towards an empty sky and the courtyards and playing-fields were equally empty. The Governors walked down to the Headmaster's house as a cortège of sleek black cars came along College Lane and drew up close to the

gates leading into the Chapel. H.B. Ellice climbed out of the leading car and strayed, rather than walked, over to the Governors. He seemed in no haste to explain matters, but turned to watch Richard Barstow's coffin being extracted from the rear of the hearse.

"Where are the boys, H.B.?" asked Sir William. "I was hoping there'd be a good turn-out for old Dick."

"The boys? Oh, I intended to make an announcement. Possibly I omitted to do so." He stroked his white thatch of hair. "My memory's so bad. I can't seem to remember anything any more."

Some of the Staff had come from the Common Room and elsewhere to make a thin line on either side of the Chapel gates. The coffin, borne by the undertaker's men, advanced by a pace at a time. But the gates, it appeared, were shut and locked. No chaplain or choir had been alerted to attend the ceremony. It was a matter for conjecture whether even the grave in the close had been prepared.

In the sudden emergency Arthur Smith proved to be a tower of strength. He procured a key from the porter's lodge and sent the porter with a message to Fatty Carpindale, who came hurrying round. Within the space of fifteen minutes a funeral service had been organized and was under way. Fatty improvised the kind words which it was possible to speak with any truth about Richard Barstow. H.B., at that stage, was noticed to be missing and it was Arthur Smith who figured as the chief mourner for the Staff at the graveside.

"If you ask me," said Oliver Stephens when the Governing Body had returned to Goldfinch Annexe, "it was lucky there was a grave."

"I suppose the undertakers insisted on that much," Jeremy Boddington explained.

"What's quite clear is that, as an administrator, H.B.'s a complete disaster. I shall never forget the coffin being put down on the flagstones. Poor old Dick, being locked out like that."

Anthony Mayburn was the first to sit down again at the table. He listened alertly to the conversation, saying nothing himself

since his case was being argued for him. Gradually the other Governors subsided into their chairs. Sir William began:

"It does rather look as if we need a new Headmaster, doesn't it? Has anybody got a proposal to put forward?"

John Jordan circulated the printed list of the Staff in order of seniority. It was clear that the selected person was likely to come from among the first eight names.

"Well, then," said Nutting, "let's have your selections in reverse order of seniority. Jeremy?"

"George Medlicott seems to me the right man for the job."

"Harry."

"I say George Medlicott too."

"Oliver."

"My vote goes to Arthur Smith. I'm impressed by him. He has what the Romans called *gravitas*. I thought he handled things well to-day."

"Giles."

"I'm against Medlicott, I'm afraid. We were informed by Rodney Webb that he had similar views about the handling of homosexuals. That seems to me to rule him out. I plump for Smith."

"Tony."

"I have no wish to be controversial," said Mayburn, "but it ought to be pointed out that we've found in favour of Rodney Webb's appeal. To some extent we've conceded that his views on homosexuality are well-founded."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Giles Hancock. "I refuted his views."

"Yes, but we're bound by the idea of corporate responsibility, whether we like it or not."

"Speak for yourself, if you please. Webb's views have been disastrous for the School."

Anthony Mayburn's habitual domination of the proceedings had led to the outbreak by the scientist, whose voice quivered with resentment. Sir William quickly interposed:

"Who is your own choice, Tony?"

"My choice is George Medlicott."

Everybody at the table turned to look at Sir William Nutting, who became flustered and without any careful consideration said:

"I must say I prefer Arthur Smith."

Slowly it dawned on him that his selection involved a deadlock.

"Oh, dear," he added. "That makes it three to three."

"It reduces our influence to its nadir," said Mayburn, "if we can't decide on one person rather than another."

It required a further hour of argument before the Governors were able to agree on their choice and it was late in the afternoon before a deputation set out for the county town. Rodney Webb, after being warned of its impending arrival, sat down to wait with Maud in the lounge of the Hollybank Hotel, where they were staying for the time being.

"It's rather late in the day for them to expect me to change my mind," he complained.

"Surely, if they make amends and if Cecil's really taken himself off, you'll go back."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course you will, Rodney. You remember when we walked to the chalk pit on the Downs and you said how much more the School belonged to you than to Cecil. Well, if he's gone, everything's turned out all right for you. You're the one who's left in possession."

"But I'm not, darling. I'm the one who's been hoofed out."

A car stopped outside and they both assumed that it contained the deputation although the squeal of the brakes would have been inconsistent with the dignity of such a body. Rodney went to the door with the face with which he confronted his daily trials. When he saw Percy Haddow standing on the step he felt relief.

"I had no idea it was you, Percy. Come in, my dear chap."

"What's been happening?" the doctor asked. "You haven't kept me informed. I rang up your House and got on to some fellow who sounded like a gym instructor."

"That's more or less what he is."

"At any rate he gave me your address, which was something. I thought I'd spend the night here as I'm on my way down to the

West. I've parked myself at the County Hotel, where I hope you'll both come to dinner with me."

"That's splendid. The only thing is, there's a deputation on its way to see me."

"Don't worry. I'll make myself scarce."

Rodney led his friend into the lounge, the furnishings of which were calculated to make any civilized person wince. After shaking hands with Maud, Percy Haddow said:

"I read in the papers about the row over the white horse."

"We're anxious to forget that as soon as possible," Maud told him.

"Oh really? Was it anything to do with Webb's?"

Rodney put in: "I understand that Tony Picton was responsible. Shortly afterwards he got into a train and was borne homewards to Maidenhead, leaving every one else to face the music."

"All the same," said Percy Haddow admiringly, "it was quite an achievement. Don't you agree, Maud?"

"I'm not sure that I do."

"In my view it was brilliant. Picton showed up what's wrong in the Godsell approach, indeed in the whole Pauline swindle in modern dress. And the action itself appeals strongly to me because it's sexually ambivalent. It applies to Picton himself as much as to your Scotsman who was expelled. The message is that we shouldn't allow ourselves to be cheated out of our fun, whatever sort of fun it may be."

"All the same," Maud protested, "there was no need to broadcast the message to half the county, was there?"

"Indeed there was, Maud. Not only did the protest need to be made: it needed to be seen to be made."

"You're incorrigible, Percy."

"And now," said the doctor, "you must explain to me what you're going to do."

But before either of them could begin to answer, Sir William Nutting's long, black, funereal car drew up outside. Rodney went to the door and greeted the Vice-Warden and Jeremy Boddington.

"Come in," he invited. "You know Dr. Haddow, who gave evidence at the hearing?"

"Yes, of course."

They both shook hands with a cordiality which failed to indicate that one considered the doctor as a charlatan and the other as a kindred spirit. Percy Haddow kept to his undertaking by insisting on leaving, having confirmed the invitation of dinner. As soon as he had departed, Sir William Nutting embarked on his diplomatic mission to Rodney Webb:

"I believe you're already aware that the Governing Body's decision was wrongly represented in a notice put up at the School. A further meeting has clarified the matter and your appeal is being upheld. That means that you have every right to continue as a Housemaster. We shall take steps to persuade Captain Meadows to return your House to you. Any criticism of your action in connexion with a particular boy, Anthony Picton, is withdrawn."

"But Picton's deserted from the School after a flagrant offence," Rodney pointed out. "It's quite obvious that I was wrong in my judgement."

"Wrong in a right cause," suggested Boddington.

"We carry the authority of the Governing Body," Nutting went on, "to offer you restitution and an apology for the disturbance which you and your wife have suffered."

Rodney, feeling himself in the grip of a new and real uncertainty, asked:

"What about the Headmaster?"

"He's likely to resign. He's been offered another job, chairing an important Church committee, as I understand."

Both Rodney and Maud began to ask the same question at once. They stopped and looked at each other and then Rodney began again:

"Who's going to be Headmaster? Not H.B. Ellice presumably?"

"No, not Ellice. Another member of the Staff." Momentarily Rodney felt certain who the new Headmaster would be.

"George Medlicott," he said rather than asked.

"No, not Medlicott. Another master."

"Which one?"

"I'm not sure we're at liberty—" Nutting began.

"Arthur Smith, as a matter of fact," Jeremy Boddington said plainly.

Rodney looked from one to the other of them while the joy which he had felt at the idea of George Medlicott's accession faded irrevocably away.

"I can't accept," he said at last. "I'm pleased that you want me to come back, but it's too late for me to change. Paul Arkwright, the Chief Education Officer, took me on because he knows my work and believes in me. I'm afraid I can't let him down."

"We can see Arkwright and explain," suggested Boddington.

"But don't you see?" asked Rodney, losing some of his discretion because of the difficulty of presenting a convincing case. "I've finished with Godsell and Godsell's finished with me. I want to breathe some new air."

"Surely," said Nutting, "there's a financial sacrifice involved."

"I assure you, Sir William, that's the least of my worries. What matters to me is that I shall be in the main stream from now on instead of in a privileged backwater."

Rodney had struck his attitude and Maud slipped her hand into his to assure him of support. The task of the delegation could now be seen to be beyond their achievement. After another quarter of an hour, Sir William Nutting thought that honour was satisfied and rose to his feet. Boddington stood up too, grinned and observed:

"Back to the backwater!"

When they were alone again, Maud told Rodney: "It's true that you wouldn't be comfortable with Arthur Smith."

He was grateful that she understood him so well.

"No," he agreed, "it would be a little bit too much like the old régime."

Sir William's powerful and comfortable car covered the twenty miles to Godsell in just over half an hour. At the approach to the small town, the chauffeur reduced speed. Jeremy Boddington pointed to a sign illuminated by the headlamps.

"Slow through Godsell," he recited. "Godsell welcomes careful drivers. That ought to be our motto, William."

'Boys in a school are like apples in a basket. If one goes rotten, it infects the others . . .'

The Rotten Apple

by Christopher Dilke

When Matron finds two boys in bed together in a monitor's cubicle, shock and intrigue invade the peaceful world of Godsell School . . .

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