CHAPTER III

THE DIGNIFIED MR. CARMYLE

I

BY six o'clock on the following evening, however, Sally had been forced to the conclusion that Ginger would have to struggle through life as best he could without the assistance of her contemplated remarks: for she had seen nothing of him all day and in another hour she would have left Roville on the seven-fifteen express which was to take her to Paris, *en route* for Cherbourg and the liner whereon she had booked her passage for New York.

It was in the faint hope of finding him even now that, at half-past six, having conveyed her baggage to the station and left it in charge of an amiable porter, she paid a last visit to the Casino Municipale. She disliked the thought of leaving Ginger without having uplifted him. Like so many alert and active-minded girls, she possessed in a great degree the quality of interesting herself in—or, as her brother Fillmore preferred to put it, messing about with—the private affairs of others. Ginger had impressed her as a man to whom it was worth while to give a friendly shove on the right path; and it was with much gratification, therefore, that, having entered the

Casino, she perceived a flaming head shining through the crowd which had gathered at one of the roulette-tables.

There are two Casinos at Roville-sur-Mer. The one on the Promenade goes in mostly for sea-air and a mild game called *boule*. It is the big Casino Municipale down in the Palace Massena near the railway station which is the haunt of the earnest gambler who means business; and it was plain to Sally directly she arrived that Ginger Kemp not only meant business but was getting results. Ginger was going extremely strong. He was entrenched behind an opulent-looking mound of square counters: and, even as Sally looked, a wooden-faced croupier shoved a further instalment across the table to him at the end of his long rake.

"*Epatant!*" murmured a wistful man at Sally's side, removing an elbow from her ribs in order the better to gesticulate. Sally, though no French scholar, gathered that he was startled and gratified. The entire crowd seemed to be startled and gratified. There is undoubtedly a certain altruism in the make-up of the spectators at a Continental roulette-table. They seem to derive a spiritual pleasure from seeing somebody else win.

The croupier gave his moustache a twist with his left hand and the wheel a twist with his right, and silence fell again. Sally, who had shifted to a spot where the pressure of the crowd was less acute, was now able to see Ginger's face, and as she saw it she gave an involuntary laugh. He looked exactly like a dog at a rat-hole. His hair seemed to bristle with excitement. One could almost fancy that his ears were pricked up.

In the tense hush which had fallen on the crowd at the restarting of the wheel, Sally's laugh rang out with an embarrassing clearness. It had a marked effect on all those within hearing. There is something almost of religious ecstasy in the deportment of the spectators at a table where anyone is having a run of luck at roulette, and if she had guffawed in a cathedral she could not have caused a more pained consternation. The earnest worshippers gazed at her with shocked eyes, and Ginger, turning with a start, saw her and jumped up. As he did so, the ball fell with a rattling click into a red compartment of the wheel; and, as it ceased to revolve and it was seen that at last the big winner had picked the wrong colour, a shuddering groan ran through the congregation like that which convulses the penitents' bench at a negro revival meeting. More glances of reproach were cast at Sally. It was generally felt that her injudicious behaviour had changed Ginger's luck.

The only person who did not appear to be concerned was Ginger himself. He gathered up his loot, thrust it into his pocket, and elbowed his way to where Sally stood, now definitely established in the eyes of the crowd as a pariah. There was universal regret that he had decided to call it a day. It was to the spectators as though a star had suddenly walked off the stage in the middle of his big scene; and not even a loud and violent quarrel which sprang up at this moment between two excitable gamblers over a disputed five-franc counter could wholly console them.

"I say," said Ginger, dexterously plucking Sally out of the crowd, "this is topping, meeting you like this. I've been looking for you everywhere."

"It's funny you didn't find me, then, for that's where I've been. I was looking for you."

"No, really?" Ginger seemed pleased. He led the way to the quiet ante-room outside the gambling-hall, and they sat down in a corner. It was pleasant here, with nobody near except the gorgeously uniformed attendant over by the door. "That was awfully good of you."

"I felt I must have a talk with you before my train went."

Ginger started violently.

"Your train? What do you mean?"

"The puff-puff," explained Sally. "I'm leaving to-night, you know."

"Leaving?" Ginger looked as horrified as the devoutest of the congregation of which Sally had just ceased to be a member. "You don't mean *leaving?* You're not going away from Roville?"

"I'm afraid so."

"But why? Where are you going?"

"Back to America. My boat sails from Cherbourg to-morrow."

"Oh, my aunt!"

"I'm sorry," said Sally, touched by his concern. She was a warm-hearted girl and liked being appreciated. "But . . ."

"I say . . ." Ginger Kemp turned bright scarlet and glared before him at the uniformed official, who was regarding their *tête-à-tête* with the indulgent eye of one who has been through this sort of thing himself. "I say, look here, will you marry me?"

II

Sally stared at his vermilion profile in frank amazement. Ginger, she had realized by this time, was in many ways a surprising young man, but she had not expected him to be as surprising as this.

"Marry you!"

"You know what I mean."

"Well, yes, I suppose I do. You allude to the holy state. Yes, I know what you mean."

"Then how about it?"

Sally began to regain her composure. Her sense of humour was tickled. She looked at Ginger gravely. He did not meet her eye, but continued to drink in the uniformed official, who was by now so carried away by the romance of it all that he had begun to hum a love-ballad under his breath. The official could not hear what they were saying, and would not have been able to understand it even if he could have heard; but he was an expert in the language of the eyes.

"But isn't this—don't think I am trying to make difficulties—isn't this a little sudden?"

"It's got to be sudden," said Ginger Kemp, complainingly. "I thought you were going to be here for weeks."

"But, my infant, my babe, has it occurred to you that we are practically strangers?" She patted his hand tolerantly, causing the uniformed official to heave a tender sigh. "I see what has happened," she said. "You're mistaking me for some other girl, some girl you know really well, and were properly introduced to. Take a good look at me, and you'll see."

"If I take a good look at you," said Ginger, feverishly, "I'm dashed if I'll answer for the consequences."

"And this is the man I was going to lecture on 'Enterprise.'"

"You're the most wonderful girl I've ever met, dash it!" said Ginger, his gaze still riveted on the official by the door. "I dare say it *is* sudden. I can't help that. I fell in love with you the moment I saw you, and there you are!"

"But . . ."

"Now, look here, I know I'm not much of a chap and all that, but . . . well, I've just won the deuce of a lot of money in there . . ."

"Would you buy me with your gold?"

"I mean to say, we should have enough to start on, and . . . of course I've made an infernal hash of everything I've tried up till now, but there must be something I can do, and you can jolly well bet I'd have a goodish stab at it. I mean to say, with you to buck me up and so forth, don't you know. Well, I mean . . ."

"Has it struck you that I may already be engaged to someone else?"

"Oh, golly! Are you?"

For the first time he turned and faced her, and there was a look in his eyes which touched Sally and drove all sense of the ludicrous out of her. Absurd as it was, this man was really serious.

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact I am," she said soberly.

Ginger Kemp bit his lip and for a moment was silent.

"Oh, well, that's torn it!" he said at last.

Sally was aware of an emotion too complex to analyse. There was pity in it, but amusement too. The emotion, though she did not recognize it, was maternal. Mothers, listening to their children pleading with engaging absurdity for something wholly out of their power to bestow, feel that same wavering between tears and laughter. Sally wanted to pick Ginger up and kiss him. The one thing she could not do was to look on him, sorry as she was for him, as a reasonable, grown-up man.

"You don't really mean it, you know."

"Don't I!" said Ginger, hollowly. "Oh, don't I!"

"You can't! There isn't such a thing in real life as love at first sight. Love's a thing that comes when you know a person well and . . ." She paused. It had just occurred to her that she was hardly the girl to lecture in this strain. Her love for Gerald Foster had been sufficiently sudden, even instantaneous. What did she know of Gerald except that she loved him? They had become engaged within two weeks of their first meeting. She found this recollection damping to her eloquence, and ended by saying tamely, "It's ridiculous."

Ginger had simmered down to a mood of melancholy resignation.

"I couldn't have expected you to care for me, I suppose, anyway," he said, sombrely. "I'm not much of a chap."

It was just the diversion from the theme under discussion which Sally had been longing to find. She welcomed the chance of continuing the conversation on a less intimate and sentimental note.

"That's exactly what I wanted to talk to you

about," she said, seizing the opportunity offered by this display of humility. "I've been looking for you all day to go on with what I was starting to say in the lift last night when we were interrupted. Do you mind if I talk to you like an aunt—or a sister, suppose we say? Really, the best plan would be for you to adopt me as an honorary sister. What do you think?"

Ginger did not appear noticeably elated at the suggested relationship.

"Because I really do take a tremendous interest in you."

Ginger brightened. "That's awfully good of you."

"I'm going to speak words of wisdom. Ginger, why don't you brace up?"

"Brace up?"

"Yes, stiffen your backbone and stick out your chin, and square your elbows, and really amount to something. Why do you simply flop about and do nothing and leave everything to what you call 'the family'? Why do you have to be helped all the time? Why don't you help yourself? Why do you have to have jobs found for you? Why don't you rush out and get one? Why do you have to worry about what 'the family' thinks of you? Why don't you make yourself independent of them? I know you had hard luck, suddenly finding yourself without money and all that, but, good heavens, everybody else in the world who has ever done anything has been broke at one time or another. It's part of the fun. You'll never get anywhere by letting yourself be picked up by the family like . . . like a floppy Newfoundland puppy and dumped down in any old place that happens to suit them. A job's a thing you've

got to choose for yourself and get for yourself. Think what you can do—there must be something—and then go at it with a snort and grab it and hold it down and teach it to take a joke. You've managed to collect some money. It will give you time to look round. And, when you've had a look round, *do* something! Try to realize you're alive, and try to imagine the family isn't!"

Sally stopped and drew a deep breath. Ginger Kemp did not reply for a moment. He seemed greatly impressed.

"When you talk quick," he said at length, in a serious meditative voice, "your nose sort of goes all squiggly. Ripping, it looks!"

Sally uttered an indignant cry.

"Do you mean to say you haven't been listening to a word I've been saying," she demanded.

"Oh, rather! Oh, by Jove, yes."

"Well, what did I say?"

"You . . . er . . . And your eyes sort of shine, too."

"Never mind my eyes. What did I say?"

"You told me," said Ginger, on reflection, "to get a job."

"Well, yes. I put it much better than that, but that's what it amounted to, I suppose. All right, then. I'm glad you . . ."

Ginger was eyeing her with mournful devotion.

"I say," he interrupted, "I wish you'd let me write to you. Letters, I mean, and all that. I have an idea it would kind of buck me up."

"You won't have time for writing letters."

"I'll have time to write them to you. You haven't an address or anything of that sort in America, have

you, by any chance? I mean, so that I'd know where to write to."

"I can give you an address which will always find me." She told him the number and street of Mrs. Meecher's boarding-house, and he wrote them down reverently on his shirt-cuff. "Yes, on second thoughts, do write," she said. "Of course, I shall want to know how you've got on. I . . . oh, my goodness! That clock's not right?"

"Just about. What time does your train go?"

"Go! It's gone! Or, at least, it goes in about two seconds." She made a rush for the swing-door, to the confusion of the uniformed official who had not been expecting this sudden activity. "Good-bye, Ginger. Write to me, and remember what I said."

Ginger, alert after his unexpected fashion when it became a question of physical action, had followed her through the swing-door, and they emerged together and started running down the square.

"Stick it!" said Ginger, encouragingly. He was running easily and well, as becomes a man who, in his day, had been a snip for his international at scrum-half.

Sally saved her breath. The train was beginning to move slowly out of the station as they sprinted abreast on to the platform. Ginger dived for the nearest door, wrenched it open, gathered Sally neatly in his arms, and flung her in. She landed squarely on the toes of a man who occupied the corner seat, and, bounding off again, made for the window. Ginger, faithful to the last, was trotting beside the train as it gathered speed.

"Ginger! My poor porter! Tip him. I forgot."

"Right ho!"

"And don't forget what I've been saying."

"Right ho!"

"Look after yourself and 'Death to the Family!'"

"Right ho!"

The train passed smoothly out of the station. Sally cast one last look back at her red-haired friend, who had now halted and was waving a handkerchief. Then she turned to apologize to the other occupant of the carriage.

"I'm so sorry," she said, breathlessly. "I hope I didn't hurt you."

She found herself facing Ginger's cousin, the dark man of yesterday's episode on the beach, Bruce Carmyle.

III

Mr. Carmyle was not a man who readily allowed himself to be disturbed by life's little surprises, but at the present moment he could not help feeling slightly dazed. He recognized Sally now as the French girl who had attracted his cousin Lancelot's notice on the beach. At least he had assumed that she was French, and it was startling to be addressed by her now in fluent English. How had she suddenly acquired this gift of tongues? And how on earth had she had time since yesterday, when he had been a total stranger to her, to become sufficiently intimate with Cousin Lancelot to be sprinting with him down station platforms and addressing him out of railway-carriage windows as Ginger? Bruce Carmyle was aware that most members of that sub-species of humanity, his cousin's personal friends, called him by that familiar—and, so Carmyle held, vulgar—nickname: but how had this girl got hold of it?

If Sally had been less pretty, Mr. Carmyle would undoubtedly have looked disapprovingly at her, for she had given his rather rigid sense of the proprieties a nasty jar. But as, panting and flushed from her run, she was prettier than any girl he had yet met, he contrived to smile.

"Not at all," he said in answer to her question, though it was far from the truth. His left big toe was aching confoundedly. Even a girl with a foot as small as Sally's can make her presence felt on a man's toe if the scrum-half who is handling her aims well and uses plenty of vigour.

"If you don't mind," said Sally, sitting down, "I think I'll breathe a little."

She breathed. The train sped on.

"Quite a close thing," said Bruce Carmyle, affably. The pain in his toe was diminishing. "You nearly missed it."

"Yes. It was lucky Mr. Kemp was with me. He throws very straight, doesn't he."

"Tell me," said Carmyle, "how do you come to know my cousin? On the beach yesterday morning . . ."

"Oh, we didn't know each other then. But we were staying at the same hotel, and we spent an hour or so shut up in an elevator together. That was when we really got acquainted."

A waiter entered the compartment, announcing in unexpected English that dinner was served in the restaurant car.

"Would you care for dinner?"

"I'm starving," said Sally.

She reproved herself, as they made their way down the corridor, for being so foolish as to judge anyone by

his appearance. This man was perfectly pleasant in spite of his grim exterior. She had decided by the time they had seated themselves at the table she liked him.

At the table, however, Mr. Carmyle's manner changed for the worse. He lost his amiability. He was evidently a man who took his meals seriously and believed in treating waiters with severity. He shuddered austerely at a stain on the table-cloth, and then concentrated himself frowningly on the bill of fare. Sally, meanwhile, was establishing cosy relations with the much too friendly waiter, a cheerful old man who from the start seemed to have made up his mind to regard her as a favourite daughter. The waiter talked no English and Sally no French, but they were getting along capitally, when Mr. Carmyle, who had been irritably waving aside the servitor's light-hearted advice—at the Hotel Splendide the waiters never bent over you and breathed cordial suggestions down the side of your face—gave his order crisply in the Anglo-Gallic dialect of the travelling Briton. The waiter remarked, "*Boum!*" in a pleased sort of way, and vanished.

"Nice old man!" said Sally.

"Infernally familiar!" said Mr. Carmyle.

Sally perceived that on the topic of the waiter she and her host did not see eye to eye and that little pleasure or profit could be derived from any discussion centring about him. She changed the subject. She was not liking Mr. Carmyle quite so much as she had done a few minutes ago, but it was courteous of him to give her dinner, and she tried to like him as much as she could.

"By the way," she said, "my name is Nicholas.

I always think it's a good thing to start with names, don't you?"

"Mine . . ."

"Oh, I know yours. Ginger—Mr. Kemp told me."

Mr. Carmyle, who since the waiter's departure, had been thawing, stiffened again at the mention of Ginger.

"Indeed?" he said, coldly. "Apparently you got intimate."

Sally did not like his tone. He seemed to be criticizing her, and she resented criticism from a stranger. Her eyes opened wide and she looked dangerously across the table.

"Why 'apparently'? I told you that we had got intimate, and I explained how. You can't stay shut up in an elevator half the night with anybody without getting to know him. I found Mr. Kemp very pleasant."

"Really?"

"And very interesting."

Mr. Carmyle raised his eyebrows.

"Would you call him interesting?"

"I *did* call him interesting." Sally was beginning to feel the exhilaration of battle. Men usually made themselves extremely agreeable to her, and she reacted belligerently under the stiff unfriendliness which had come over her companion in the last few minutes.

"He told me all about himself."

"And you found that interesting?"

"Why not?"

"Well . . ." A frigid half-smile came and went on Bruce Carmyle's dark face. "My cousin has many excellent qualities, no doubt—he used to play football well, and I understand that he is a capable

amateur pugilist—but I should not have supposed him entertaining. We find him a little dull."

"I thought it was only royalty that called themselves 'we.'"

"I meant myself—and the rest of the family."

The mention of the family was too much for Sally. She had to stop talking in order to allow her mind to clear itself of rude thoughts.

"Mr. Kemp was telling me about Mr. Scrymgeour," she went on at length.

Bruce Carmyle stared for a moment at the yard or so of French bread which the waiter had placed on the table.

"Indeed?" he said. "He has an engaging lack of reticence."

The waiter returned bearing soup and dumped it down.

"*V'la!*" he observed, with the satisfied air of a man who has successfully performed a difficult conjuring trick. He smiled at Sally expectantly, as though confident of applause from this section of his audience at least. But Sally's face was set and rigid. She had been snubbed, and the sensation was as pleasant as it was novel.

"I think Mr. Kemp had hard luck," she said.

"If you will excuse me, I would prefer not to discuss the matter."

Mr. Carmyle's attitude was that Sally might be a pretty girl, but she was a stranger, and the intimate affairs of the Family were not to be discussed with strangers, however prepossessing.

"He was quite in the right. Mr. Scrymgeour was beating a dog . . ."

"I've heard the details."

"Oh, I didn't know that. Well, don't you agree with me, then?"

"I do not. A man who would throw away an excellent position simply because . . ."

"Oh, well, if that's your view, I suppose it *is* useless to talk about it."

"Quite."

"Still, there's no harm in asking what you propose to do about Gin—about Mr. Kemp."

Mr. Carmyle became more glacial.

"I'm afraid I cannot discuss . . ."

Sally's quick impatience, nobly restrained till now, finally got the better of her.

"Oh, for goodness' sake," she snapped, "do try to be human, and don't always be snubbing people. You remind me of one of those portraits of men in the eighteenth century, with wooden faces, who look out of heavy gold frames at you with fishy eyes as if you were a regrettable incident."

"Rosbif," said the waiter genially, manifesting himself suddenly beside them as if he had popped up out of a trap.

Bruce Carmyle attacked his roast beef morosely. Sally who was in the mood when she knew that she would be ashamed of herself later on, but was full of battle at the moment, sat in silence.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Carmyle ponderously, "if my eyes are fishy. The fact has not been called to my attention before."

"I suppose you never had any sisters," said Sally. "They would have told you."

Mr. Carmyle relapsed into an offended dumbness, which lasted till the waiter had brought the coffee.

"I think," said Sally, getting up, "I'll be going

now. I don't seem to want any coffee, and, if I stay on, I may say something rude. I thought I might be able to put in a good word for Mr. Kemp and save him from being massacred, but apparently it's no use. Good-bye, Mr. Carmyle, and thank you for giving me dinner."

She made her way down the car, followed by Bruce Carmyle's indignant, yet fascinated, gaze. Strange emotions were stirring in Mr. Carmyle's bosom.