

## CHAPTER IX

A SUDDEN change took place in the night. The icy wind sank. A warm rain began to fall. It rained all the next morning while Mark was writing letters; but after lunch the sun came out hotly and, when Mark strolled across the Common, a miracle had taken place. The trees had, in this short space, uncurled their leaves and he walked under a bower of green. Boys were bathing in the pond. In the Gardens the swan-boats were making their first voyage across the little lake, laden with children. Gardeners were planting out flowering shrubs. There was no spring, Mark thought, as he leant over the little bridge and watched the boats; yesterday was winter, today is summer. It was an exciting place to be in and now he could explore it as he chose, for Honey-Lou was off to the school she attended each day. A few days would pass before he himself went to school.

He settled very comfortably into the ways of the

household. Janet and her friends found him amusing, with his mixture of grown-up manners and lack of experience. He had led the cloistered life of the English schoolboy. What was an old story to Palmer was new and exciting to Mark. What Camilla found trying was his untidiness. She had thought Palmer was untidy, but never had he strewn his belongings about as did Mark, who had been waited on, hand and foot, all his life. He was rather trying, too, about his meals, wanting the food to which he was accustomed, showing no desire to acquire a taste for the new. More than once she felt distinctly irritated. It seemed unbearable that she could exert no real authority over her son.

She felt this strongly a fortnight after Mark had begun school. He was to spend his Sundays at the Wyldes'. There were not many weeks left until the end of term. He had taken a good place in his grade with the exception of a few subjects. He was somewhat behind the other boys in mathematics and spelling and he knew nothing of American history. But he was advanced far beyond them in classics. He wrote a perfect hand. He wrote and spoke French very well. He was good at games, though his attempts at baseball brought howls of mirth from his fellows.

But they were, on the whole, friendly toward him. He settled down without too much difficulty. He found the teachers kind and helpful.

On his second Sunday Camilla said to him, when she came to say good-night :

“ I wonder if you know, Mark, that your teeth need attention. As you lie on your back I can see that some of your teeth are not in perfect position. They need regulating.”

“ Do they ? ” he returned politely, but without interest.

“ Very badly,” she answered with more firmness. “ I have made an appointment for you with Dr. Graves, my dentist, and telephoned the school you will be late on Monday.”

He put his finger in his mouth. “ That tooth,” he said, “ aches a bit when I eat ice-cream.”

“ But you should have told me.”

“ Oh, it’s nothing.”

“ I can’t help being surprised,” she said, “ that your teeth haven’t been straightened before now. Of course the irregularity is slight but it keeps your smile from being as attractive as it ought to be.”

He laughed. “ It’s good enough for me.”

“ Evidently the Rendels thought so.” She spoke

crisply. Then controlling her irritation, she added, — “They’ll be delighted, and so will you, with Dr. Graves’ work. He is the best man in Boston for children’s teeth.”

A withdrawing look had come into his eyes. “It’s very kind of you,” he said gravely, “to offer to have my teeth straightened, but I think my parents would have had it done if they’d thought it necessary.”

“Now, Mark,” she said, smiling, “that’s just silly. Your parents,” (she forced the word to her lips) “were probably too busy to properly attend to your teeth. I’m sure they’d be delighted to have it done over here.”

“They’re not nearly so busy as you are,” he answered argumentatively, “and I think they’d rather look after me themselves, thank you.”

She was breathing quickly. She said, — “Don’t let’s go on talking about it, Mark. I’ve made the appointment for ten, Monday. I’ll take you to the office myself and we’ll see just how long the straightening will require. I imagine it can be done in a year, as the teeth aren’t very much out of place.” She smiled cheerfully, though she felt angered by his wrong-headedness and by what seemed to her his rather superior air where the Rendels were concerned.

"I don't think I want my teeth straightened," he returned, as though that put an end to the discussion.

"Well, we'll not argue about it." She bent and gave him a cool kiss. "I think Dr. Graves will be able to convince you how foolish you are."

To Robert she said, — "Mark has a will like iron. If I'd had him always with me, he wouldn't be so stubborn."

"I guess he wouldn't," answered Robert. "But don't worry. Graves will persuade him and, if he doesn't, what does it matter? My teeth were never straightened and I've got along all right."

"That's just plain silly," she retorted.

Mark had indeed a strong will. Even after the interview with Dr. Graves, he refused to change his mind. Camilla felt almost unnerved as she drove him back to the school. Mark sat beside her, small and detached, looking straight ahead of him.

Camilla did not again refer to the matter. She was charming to him when he came from school at the next week-end, but an element of tenseness had come into their relations. Once or twice she spoke to him with an air of quick authority, as though she looked for opposition from him. Toward the end of June the family went to their summer home on

an island in a New Hampshire lake.

Lake Osonaga lay below the foothills of the Adirondacks. The mountain peaks rose dark-blue in the distance. Dense woods crowded the shores of the lake, which were indented with many little bays where the pines cast their shadows on the peaceful water. The island where the Wyldes lived had once been farmland though part of it was wooded. They shared the island with another family but they owned the greater part and lived in the old white farmhouse. Their neighbours, the Greenes, had built themselves a picturesque log-house on the very edge of the lake. The two families were close friends and the young people had been brought up in a pleasant intimacy. Both families were watching with approval the progress of the friendship between Janet and young Gideon Greene. He was an undergraduate at Harvard and his sisters were lively girls of twelve and fifteen.

The first morning that Mark woke in the New England farmhouse he lay dazed for a space, not able to collect his thoughts. Where was he now? He had had many changes but this seemed the most stupendous to him. This place was so different from all other places he knew. Now indeed he felt himself in a new world. It was very early morning. He could tell by

the ruddy sunlight. He lay still and looked about the room.

It was small, the walls were of pine and here and there knots made curious shapes in the boards. There was the pleasant, keen scent of the wood. A hooked mat, in the design of a sailing ship, lay by the bed. A patchwork quilt lay folded at the foot. The house was very still but the song of birds came through the window. Through it he could see barn-swallows darting across the limpid blue of the sky. He thought he would start out, all by himself, and explore.

He pulled on his trousers and jersey and threw his bathing-trunks and bath-towel over his shoulder. In the passage he could hear Robert steadily snoring. He liked Robert and he felt sorry for him because he had to go back to the town tomorrow. Robert had not nearly such a good time, he thought, as his own father had. The stairs creaked horribly, but at last he was out in the open. He drew a deep breath of happiness.

Behind the house stretched a large field surrounded on three sides by the woods. The grass was tall and starred by little blue flowers and bright-faced daisies. The field sloped steeply down to the lake, glimpsed between the trees, and a narrow path led to it from the door. He ran down the path, feeling the tickle of

the grasses against his bare ankles.

The woods were deliciously cool, the path slippery with pine needles. He trotted where it led, the tranquil lake to his left, the great pines to his right. There had been a hurricane the year before and many of the tallest trees had been blown down. Some had fallen across the path. He clambered over them or crept under. One was a grand silver birch and he stopped to stroke the satin smoothness of its bark. He peeled off a little. He would make something out of the bark later on and send it home to his mother for a present: How kind she had been to agree to his coming out here! He realized that it had been a hard pull for her.

Half a mile along the path he discovered a little point and a sandy cove. On the sand were lying two canoes and a skiff, all ready for use. He had never been in a canoe but now he would learn to paddle. He would make Humphrey green with envy. He got into his trunks and ran out across the ripple of sand into the lake. He plunged and swam.

He swam again, later in the day, when all the family went in. He felt he never could stay too long in this temperate water. He romped with Janet and Honey-Lou, who swam as well as he did. Robert



promised him they would go fishing that evening. Camilla joined them a little later. She looked beautiful in her bathing-dress, Mark thought. She could dive and swim like a boy. She did her utmost in front of Mark. She wanted him to be proud of her.

When, in the evening, they went in a body to their neighbours she had a little possessive air toward Mark. She kept him near her and encouraged him to join in the talk. Mrs. Greene said she thought the experiment with the two boys would be splendid for them, but she wondered how Camilla had the strength of mind to leave Palmer so far away for a whole year, especially in such times as these. Camilla, feeling a certain criticism in her friend's tone, went into careful details of her visit to the Rendels, of their way of living and of the care Palmer would have. As for war, it had been threatening for so long without coming, surely they could count on another year of peace and, if it did come, Palmer would be safe in the English countryside till he was sent for. She refused to think of war. Indeed Camilla took it as an almost personal affront that Europe, where she went every spring, should be threatened.

Mark had never seen a house like the Greens',

and it seemed to him quite perfect for a summer's pleasure. Round the large living-room ran a gallery from which the bedrooms opened. It produced a jolly, communal atmosphere, he thought. He liked the deep verandah, the white-coated Filipino who circulated iced ginger-ale and Coca-Cola throughout the evening. He liked the Greene family, with the one exception of Gideon Greete.

He did not very much like him on that first evening. Soon he felt active dislike. Young Greene owned a fast motor launch and it was his chief occupation to race up and down the lake in it. Timid canoeists and fishermen were terrified of him. Robert, as a fisherman, disliked the launch, and though he realized that Janet was going to make a good match for herself, he felt no real warmth toward his future son-in-law. The two had become engaged soon after the reunion at Lake Osonaga.

There was nothing Mark enjoyed more than tearing about the lake in the speed-boat with the other young people. There was a recklessness, a devil-may-careness which was a new element in life to him. He had been brought up to a rigid consideration of the rights of others. Now he experienced the pleasure of ruthless high speed. They sang and shouted as they

ripped the waves apart. Their thin summer garments fluttered against their sides.

Young Greene soon discovered that Mark was sensitive and that he could easily be annoyed. It amused him to get Mark in a temper that would send the three younger girls into delighted giggles. Janet was always on Mark's side and, for some reason, that spurred Greene on. He resented Mark and often compared him unfavourably with Palmer.

"He's so high-hat," he would say, when Janet stood up for Mark, "and a sissy. He's so goddam British that you only have to look at the back of his neck to hear the band playing 'Rule, Britannia.'"

Week after week there was perfect weather. The woods, the lake, the distant mountains, all day long received the blessing of the sun and, at night, the enchantment of the moon. Flowers turned to berries, grass to grain, fledglings to winging birds, Mark's pink-and-whiteness to Indian brown.

Every week the news grew worse. The name of Poland became the threat of disaster.

"You can bet your bottom dollar," Gideon Greene said to Mark, "that we're going to keep out of this war. So don't you go asking us to fight your battles for you."

“We don’t want you,” returned Mark hotly. “England and France can lick Germany without your help.”

“Then why didn’t you do it in the last war?” asked Gideon, smiling.

“If you’re going to start that,” said Janet, “I’ll jump overboard.”

“Mark would jump in and save you,” laughed Gideon, “without my help. Just the way England’s going to save Democracy without our help.”

“You said yesterday,” answered Mark, turning pale, “that Democracy had nothing to do with it.”

“Neither it has ! it’s going to be a war for power — nothing else. If England wants to get into it, let her get out of it ! She needn’t expect us to foot the bill.” His smile had died. There was a savage note in his voice.

“Oh, for goodness’ sake !” cried Janet.

“Oh, for crying out loud !” shouted Gideon, laughing again.

They had been loitering in a water-lilied bay. Now he let out the speed and the launch bounded into the open. Mark sat white and rigid. As Janet and he went up the path to the house he said :

“I shall never go out in that boat again, Jan.”

“You mustn't mind Gid. They're all like that at Harvard. He'll get over it.”

“I wish you weren't engaged to him, Jan.”

Janet laughed and, walking behind Mark on the narrow path, propelled him gently forward by her hands laid on his shoulders. She said :

“Some day you and Gid will be the best of friends. You've got to be, for my sake, because I'm so fond of you both, though he is a big silly and you're a little silly.”

Gideon himself tried a few days later to make friends with Mark.

“Come on out in my boat,” he said. “Let's kiss and make up.”

Mark turned a rigid face on him. “I'll see you in hell,” he said, “before I go out in your boat again.” He ran off into the woods.

In those days he hung for news over the radio which stood in the living-room. Camilla hated to see him wasting the good hours of sunshine and fresh air, when he should have been carefree and happy, in this tense expectancy of war news. She said :

“Mark, dear, I can't have you humped up before the radio like this. It's perfectly lovely outdoors:

Do run along and leave worrying to us grown-ups."

"I'm not worrying."

"Yes you are. I wish you could see the lines in your forehead. You look like a little old man." She laid her cool hand on his brow.

He drew away and a stubborn look came into his eyes. "I get plenty of exercise," he said. "I came in just a little while ago."

"It's much longer than you think. I am afraid I must insist. I noticed how little breakfast you ate."

"I had too much ice-cream last night."

"Nonsense." She smiled but she put her hand in front of him and turned off the radio. "It's suffocating in here. Run off and find the girls. They want your opinion about a butterfly they've caught."

He rose and she noticed how much taller and thinner he had got during the summer.

"Won't you have a glass of milk before going out, dear?" she asked.

"No, thank you. I hate milk."

"Why, Mark, you said only the other day you'd never tasted such good milk in your life!"

"I know, but I hate it."

"I think you're being just a little perverse; It's annoying, I know, not to be allowed to do exactly

as you want to, but I didn't expect you to be quite so unreasonable."

He looked at her without speaking.

"I'm quite willing," she said, "to let you listen to a certain amount of radio news, but I must put a limit on it. I do think I'm being reasonable, don't you?"

"Quite. Thank you." He gave a stiff little bow and left her.

Camilla pressed her fingers to her temples. He has the power of exhausting me," she thought. He is so hard. And you just can't convince him he's ever wrong. He has a will like iron."

In the next two days she did not once find Mark at the radio. He seemed to be keeping out of her way. Then Honey-Lou said, as though inconsequently

"Mark goes over to the Hamills' to listen to their radio. He likes it over there. They're kind, he says."

The Hamill had the little post-office on the nearby mainland.

"How does he go there?"

"He rows across. He stays there a long while. He says the Hamills are kind."

A tiny pulse began to beat in Camilla's throat. There was a sensation of trembling in her breast. But

she kept her face calm. "Honey-Lou," she said, "I have a letter to Daddy I want to mail. Let's paddle over to the post-office now, before the sun gets any hotter."

"Mark's there now, I think." Honey-Lou gave her a shrewd look.

"Is he? It doesn't matter."

"Can I buy an Eskimo pie and a cone?"

"If you like."

They went down the path to the shore. The tall grass of the field was ripened to a swarthy gold. Brown-eyed-susan scattered through it like gipsy girls wandering. The devil's-paintbrush held up his scarlet warning. Underneath crept the bright leaves of poison-ivy.

"Look out for it!" cried Camilla, and swung Honey-Lou across the danger. "Those bare ankles of yours!"

"I'm not allergic to it," said Honey-Lou, "but Palmer was. Do you remember Palmer?"

"How *can* you ask such a question, Honey-Lou? As though I could forget Palmer."

"I wish Palmer'd come home and Mark'd go back to England. He's not going to get on well, here. Gid Greene says so. Mark's snagged him already."



“I am afraid Mark is too critical.”

“Mark says the Hamills are kind.”

“You have told me that twice already.”

“I didn’t think you’d heard. You acted like you hadn’t heard.”

Camilla pushed the canoe. She loved the soft crunch of its keel on the sand. In the fast-filling groove it left, a little frog was squatting.

“Be careful, darling! Don’t step on him,” she cried.

Honey-Lou, all sleek mahogany-coloured legs and arms, scrambled into the canoe. Camilla put a paddle into her hands. They glided out on the blueness of the lake. Today the feel of fall was in the air. A haze dimmed the far-off mountain peaks. The foliage on the nearby islands showed here and there a maple, reddening from gold. Fallen leaves were blown on their fateful journey across the lake. One had as its passenger a lonely caterpillar. Summer was over, thought Camilla, and how strange a summer! And disappointing. At this moment she felt less near to Mark than she had at its beginning. Yet she felt the chill intimacy that anger brings. Oh, why had fate done this thing to her — taken away her child for thirteen years, then returned him, but only half-

returned him, set in a strange mould ! And she dare not tell him who he was.

They walked up the hot sandy path to the post-office. They could hear a man's voice talking loudly over the radio. They paused by an open window and saw Mark sitting by the radio, his hands on the arms of the chair. Mrs. Hamill was bent over by the stove, taking a pan of cookies out of the oven. It must be insufferably hot in there.

Honey-Lou jumped up and down, peeping into the window. She began to giggle.

"Come," said Camilla, and led the way into the post-office.

Mrs. Hamill handed out the bundle of letters and newspapers. She raised her voice above the voice of the radio.

"Things look awful bad," she said. "Your little English boy's here listening in. He seems to like to come to my place. He's welcome. I guess he's sort of lonesome for home since all the trouble began."

"He's a great deal better off where he is," answered Camilla coldly.

"Well, what about your own boy? Are you goin' to leave him over there if war comes?"

“Not for a moment after there is any danger. Mr. Wylde and I are convinced that he will be perfectly safe. If there is fighting, it will be on the Continent.”

“The English boy says he wishes he was back home.”

Camilla fixed the stamp to her letter and dropped it into the box without speaking, but she was deeply angry. To think that Mark would tell these Hamills he wished he was back in England! To think that he had no affection or gratitude in return for the care she had poured on him!

When he returned to the farmhouse she was alone on the verandah with a book. She looked across it at him coming up the steps. His face was troubled and beads of sweat stood on his forehead. She exclaimed:

“How could you treat me so, Mark! You know very well that, if you simply *must* listen to the radio continually, I'd a thousand times sooner you did it here than in that kitchen of Hamill's? It's certainly humiliating for me to go to the post-office and find you there and then have Mrs. Hamill behave as though she were the only friend you have.”

He stood looking down at his shoes without speak-

ing for a space. They were canvas shoes and there was a small hole in one, through which his bare toe peeped in a ridiculous and innocent way. Then he said slowly :

“ I knew you didn't like to hear the wireiess very much, so I went to the Hamills' because they don't mind. They're very kind.”

She fixed her eyes compellingly on his.

“ Am I so unkind then ? You seem to spend a good deal of your time repeating how kind the Hamills are.”

A quiver passed over his face, but he returned her gaze steadily. “ I didn't mean that. Of course you've been very kind. But I expected you would. I didn't expect the Hamills to be so kind to a foreigner.”

“ You're not a foreigner, Mark ! We don't think of English people as foreigners. We speak the same language. We have very much the same way of life.”

“ I feel like a foreigner.”

“ But why should you ? ” she cried in exasperation and hurt. “ If you knew how cruel you are being ! You make me feel that I have utterly failed in making you one of us. What is the matter ? What have I done ? You weren't like this a little while

ago." His eyes were wet with tears.

"I expect it's the war."

"There is no war — yet."

"There will be." He could see that it was in her mind to come to him, to take him in her arms. He turned quickly and ran down the steps of the verandah and across the field.

Two days later war was declared.