

The Hotel Child, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

It is a place where one's instinct is to give a reason for being there—"Oh, you see, I'm here because—" Failing that, you are faintly suspect, because this corner of Europe does not draw people; rather, it accepts them without too many inconvenient questions—live and let live. Routes cross here—people bound for private clinics or tuberculosis resorts in the mountains, people who are no longer persona grata in Italy or France. And if that were all—

Yet on a gala night at the Hotel des Trois Mondes a new arrival would scarcely detect the current beneath the surface. Watching the dancing there would be a gallery of Englishwomen of a certain age, with neckbands, dyed hair and faces powdered pinkish gray; a gallery of American women of a certain age, with snowy-white transformations, black dresses and lips of cherry red. And most of them with their eyes swinging right or left from time to time to rest upon the ubiquitous Fifi. The entire hotel had been made aware that Fifi had reached the age of eighteen that night.

Fifi Schwartz. An exquisitely, radiantly beautiful Jewess whose fine, high forehead sloped gently up to where her hair, bordering it like an armorial shield, burst into lovelocks and waves and curlicues of soft dark red. Her eyes were bright, big, clear, wet and shining; the color of her cheeks and lips was real, breaking close to the surface from the strong young pump of her heart. Her body was so assertively adequate that one cynic had been heard to remark that she always looked as if she had nothing on underneath her dresses; but he was probably wrong, for Fifi had been as thoroughly equipped for beauty by man as by God. Such dresses—cerise for Chanel, mauve for Molyneux, pink for Patou; dozens of them, tight at the hips, swaying, furling, folding just an eighth of an inch off the dancing floor. Tonight she was a woman of thirty in dazzling black, with long white gloves dripping from her forearms. "Such ghastly taste," the whispers said. "The stage, the shop window, the manikins' parade. What can her mother be thinking? But, then, look at her mother."

Her mother sat apart with a friend and thought about Fifi and Fifi's brother, and about her other daughters, now married, whom she considered to have been even prettier than Fifi. Mrs. Schwartz was a plain woman; she had been a Jewess a long time, and it was a matter of effortless indifference to her what was said by the groups around the room. Another large class who did not care were the young men—dozens of them. They followed Fifi about all day in and out of motorboats, night clubs, inland lakes, automobiles, tea rooms and funiculars, and they said, "Hey, look, Fifi!" and showed off for her, or said, "Kiss me, Fifi," or even, "Kiss me again, Fifi," and abused her and tried to be engaged to her.

Most of them, however, were too young, since this little city, through some illogical reasoning, is supposed to have an admirable atmosphere as an educational center.

Fifi was not critical, nor was she aware of being criticized herself. Tonight the gallery in the great, crystal, horseshoe room made observations upon her birthday party, being somewhat querulous about Fifi's entrance. The table had been set in the last of a string of dining rooms, each accessible from the central hall. But Fifi, her black dress shouting and halloing for notice, came in by way of the first dining room, followed by a whole platoon of young men of all possible

nationalities and crosses, and at a sort of little run that swayed her lovely hips and tossed her lovely head, led them bumpily through the whole vista, while old men choked on fish bones, old women's facial muscles sagged, and the protest rose to a roar in the procession's wake.

They need not have resented her so much. It was a bad party, because Fifi thought she had to entertain everybody and be a dozen people, so she talked to the entire table and broke up every conversation that started, no matter how far away from her. So no one had a good time, and the people in the hotel needn't have minded so much that she was young and terribly happy.

Afterward, in the salon, many of the supernumerary males floated off with a temporary air to other tables. Among these was young Count Stanislas Borowki, with his handsome, shining brown eyes of a stuffed deer, and his black hair already dashed with distinguished streaks like the keyboard of a piano. He went to the table of some people of position named Taylor and sat down with just a faint sigh, which made them smile.

"Was it ghastly?" he was asked.

The blond Miss Howard who was traveling with the Taylors was almost as pretty as Fifi and stitched up with more consideration. She had taken pains not to make Miss Schwartz's acquaintance, although she shared several of the same young men. The Taylors were career people in the diplomatic service and were now on their way to London, after the League Conference at Geneva. They were presenting Miss Howard at court this season. They were very Europeanized Americans; in fact, they had reached a position where they could hardly be said to belong to any nation at all; certainly not to any great power, but perhaps to a sort of Balkanlike state composed of people like themselves. They considered that Fifi was as much of a gratuitous outrage as a new stripe in the flag.

The tall Englishwoman with the long cigarette holder and the half-paralyzed Pekingese presently got up, announcing to the Taylors that she had an engagement in the bar.

"Most awfully kind of you to ask me for coffee," she strained forth. "I've been so blind drunk ever since I landed here that I haven't remembered to order any."

Lady Capps-Kar strolled away, carrying her paralyzed Pekingese and causing, as she passed, a chilled lull in the seething baby talk that raged around Fifi's table.

About midnight, Mr. Weicker, the assistant manager, looked into the bar, where Fifi's phonograph roared new German tangoes into the smoke and clatter. He had a small face that looked into things quickly, and lately he had taken a cursory glance into the bar every night. But he had not come to admire Fifi; he was engaged in an inquiry as to why matters were not going well at the Hotel des Trois Mondes this summer.

There was, of course, the continually sagging American Stock Exchange. With so many hotels begging to be filled, the clients had become finicky, exigent, quick to complain, and Mr. Weicker had had many fine decisions to make recently. One large family had departed because of a night-going phonograph belonging to Lady Capps-Karr. Also there was presumably a thief operating in the hotel; there had been complaints about pocketbooks, cigarette cases, watches and rings. Guests sometimes spoke

to Mr. Weicker as if they would have liked to search his pockets. There were empty suites that need not have been empty this summer.

His glance fell dourly, in passing, upon Count Borowki, who was playing pool with Fifi. Count Borowki had not paid his bill for three weeks. He had told Mr. Weicker that he was expecting his mother, who would arrange everything. Then there was Fifi, who attracted an undesirable crowd—young students living on pensions who often charged drinks, but never paid for them. Lady Capps-Karr, on the contrary, was a grande cliente; one could count three bottles of whisky a day for herself and entourage, and her father in London was good for every drop of it. Mr. Weicker decided to issue an ultimatum about Borowki's bill this very night, and withdrew. His visit had lasted about ten seconds.

Count Borowki put away his cue and came close to Fifi, whispering something. She seized his hand and pulled him to a dark corner near the phonograph.

"My American dream girl," he said. "We must have you painted in Budapest the way you are tonight. You will hang with the portraits of my ancestors in my castle in Transylvania."

One would suppose that a normal American girl, who had been to an average number of moving pictures, would have detected a vague ring of familiarity in Count Borowki's persistent wooing. But the Hotel des Trois Mondes was full of people who were actually rich and noble, people who did fine embroidery or took cocaine in closed apartments and meanwhile laid claim to European thrones and half a dozen mediatized German principalities, and Fifi did not choose to doubt the one who paid court to her beauty. Tonight she was surprised at nothing: not even his precipitate proposal that they get married this very week.

"Mamma doesn't want that I should get married for a year. I only said I'd be engaged to you."

"But my mother wants me to marry. She is hard-boiling, as you Americans say; she brings pressure to bear that I marry Princess This and Countess That."

Meanwhile Lady Capps-Karr was having a reunion across the room. A tall, stooped Englishman, dusty with travel, had just opened the door of the bar, and Lady Capps-Karr, with a caw of "Bopes!" had flung herself upon him: "Bopes, I say!"

"Capps, darling. Hi, there, Rafe—" this to her companion. "Good God, fancy running into you, Capps."

"Bopes! Bopes!"

Their exclamations and laughter filled the room, and the bartender whispered to an inquisitive American that the new arrival was the Marquis Kinkallow.

Bopes stretched himself out in several chairs and a sofa, took a hasheesh tablet from a silver box which he proffered to the other two, and called for the barman. He announced that he had driven from Paris without a stop and was going over the Simplon pass next morning to meet the only woman he had ever loved, in Milan. He did not look in a condition to meet anyone.

"Oh, Bopes, I've been so blind," said Lady Capps-Karr pathetically. "Day after day after day. I flew here from Cannes, meaning to stay one day, and I ran into Rafe here and some other Americans I knew, and it's been two weeks, and now all my tickets to Malta are void. Stay here and save me! Oh, Bopes! Bopes! Bopes!"

The Marquis Kinkallow glanced with tired eyes about the bar.

"Ah, who is that?" he demanded, surreptitiously feeding a hasheesh tablet to the Pekingese. "The lovely Jewess? And who is that item with her?"

"She's an American," said the daughter of a hundred earls. "The man is a scoundrel of some sort, but apparently he's a cat of the stripe; he's a great pal of Schenzi, in Vienna. I sat up till five the other night playing two-handed chemin de fer with him here in the bar and he owes me a mille Swiss."

"Have to have a word with that wench," said Bopes twenty minutes later. "You arrange it for me, Rafe, that's a good chap."

Ralph Berry had met Miss Schwartz, and, as the opportunity for the introduction now presented itself, he rose obligingly. The opportunity was that a chasseur had just requested Count Borowki's presence in the office; he managed to beat two or three young men to her side.

"The Marquis Kinkallow is so anxious to meet you. Can't you come and join us?"

Fifi looked across the room, her fine brow wrinkling a little. Something warned her that her evening was full enough already. Lady Capps-Karr had never spoken to her; Fifi believed she was jealous of her clothes.

"Can't you bring him over here?"

A minute later Bopes sat down beside Fifi with a shadow of fine tolerance settling on his face. This was nothing he could help; in fact, he constantly struggled against it, but it was something that happened to his expression when he met Americans. "The whole thing is too much for me," it seemed to say. "Compare my confidence with your uncertainty, my sophistication with your naiveté, and yet the whole world has slid into your power." Of later years he found that his tone, unless carefully guarded, held a smoldering resentment.

Fifi eyed him brightly and told him about her glamorous future.

"Next I'm going to Paris," she said, announcing the fall of Rome, "to, maybe, study at the Sorbonne. Then, maybe, I'll get married; you can't tell. I'm only eighteen. I had eighteen candles on my birthday cake tonight. I wish you could have been here... I've had marvelous offers to go on the stage, but of course a girl on the stage gets talked about so."

"What are you doing tonight?" asked Bopes.

"Oh, lots more boys are coming in later. Stay around and join the party."

"I thought you and I might do something. I'm going to Milan tomorrow."

Across the room, Lady Capps-Karr was tense with displeasure at the desertion.

"After all," she protested, "a chep's a chep, and a chum's a chum, but there are certain things that one simply doesn't do. I never saw Bopes in such frightful condition."

She stared at the dialogue across the room.

"Come along to Milan with me," the marquis was saying. "Come to Tibet or Hindustan. We'll see them crown the King of Ethiopia. Anyhow, let's go for a drive right now."

"I got too many guests here. Besides, I don't go out to ride with people the first time I meet them. I'm supposed to be engaged. To a Hungarian count. He'd be furious and would probably challenge you to a duel."

Annoyed at her resistance, Bopes resorted to his usual solution in a difficulties, which was another "happy" from the silver case. Whenever the explanation of this peculiarity seemed in order, he would make a gloomy reference to the war.

Mrs. Schwartz, with an apologetic expression, came across the room to Fifi.

"John's gone," she announced. "He's up there again."

Fifi gave a yelp of annoyance. "He gave me his word of honor he would not go."

"Anyhow, he went. I looked in his room and his hat's gone. It was that champagne at dinner." She turned to the marquis. "John is not a vicious boy, but vurry, vurry weak."

"I suppose I'll have to go after him," said Fifi resignedly.

"I hate to spoil your good time tonight, but I don't know what else. Maybe this gentleman would go with you. You see, Fifi is the only one that can handle him. His father is dead and it really takes a man to handle a boy."

"Quite," said Bopes.

"Can you take me?" Fifi asked. "It's just up in town to a café."

He agreed with alacrity. Out in the September night, with her fragrance seeping through an ermine cape, she explained further:

"Some Russian woman's got hold of him; she claims to be a countess, but she's only got one silver-fox fur, that she wears with everything. My brother's just nineteen, so whenever he's had a couple glasses champagne he says he's going to marry her, and mother worries."

Bopes' arm dropped impatiently around her shoulder as they started up the hill to the town.

Fifteen minutes later the car stopped at a point several blocks beyond the café and Fifi stepped out. The marquis' face was now decorated by a long, irregular finger-nail scratch that ran diagonally across his cheek, traversed his nose in a few sketchy lines and finished in a sort of grand terminal of tracks upon his lower jaw.

"I don't like to have anybody get so foolish," Fifi explained. "You needn't wait. We can get a taxi."

"Wait!" cried the marquis furiously. "For a common little person like you? They tell me you're the laughingstock of the hotel, and I quite understand why."

Fifi hurried along the street and into the café, pausing in the door until she saw her brother. He was a reproduction of Fifi without her high warmth; at the moment he was sitting quite drunk at a table with a frail exile from the Caucasus and two Serbian consumptives. Fifi waited for her temper to rise to an executive pitch; then she crossed the dance floor, conspicuous as a thundercloud in her bright black dress.

"Mamma sent me after you, John. Get your coat."

"Oh, what's biting her?" he demanded, with a vague eye.

"Mamma says you should come along."

He got up unwillingly. The two Serbians rose also; the countess never moved; her eyes, sunk deep in Mongol cheek bones, never left Fifi's face; her head crouched in the silver-fox fur which Fifi knew represented her brother's last month's allowance. As John Schwartz stood there swaying unsteadily the orchestra launched into *Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss*. Diving into the confusion of the table, Fifi emerged with her brother's arm, marched him to the coat room and then out toward the taxi stand in the *Place Saint-Francois*.

It was late, the evening was over, her birthday was over, and driving back to the hotel, with John slumped against her shoulder, Fifi felt a sudden depression. By virtue of her fine health she had never been a worrier, and certainly the Schwartz family had lived so long against similar backgrounds that Fifi felt no insufficiency in the *Hotel des Trois Mondes* as club and community—and yet the evening was suddenly all wrong. Did English lords attack girls like Miss Howard in motor cars? Didn't evenings sometimes end on a high note and not fade out vaguely in bars? After ten o'clock every night she felt she was the only real being in a colony of ghosts, that she was surrounded by utterly intangible figures who retreated whenever she stretched out her hand.

The doorman assisted her brother to the elevator. Stepping in, Fifi saw, too late, that there were two other people inside. Before she could pull John out again, they had both brushed past her as if in fear of contamination. Fifi heard "Mercy!" from Mrs. Taylor and "How revolting!" from Miss Howard. The elevator mounted. Fifi held her breath until it stopped at her floor.

It was, perhaps, the impact of this last encounter that caused her to stand very still just inside the door of the dark apartment. Then she had the sense that someone else was there in the blackness ahead of her, and after her brother had stumbled forward and thrown himself on a sofa, she still waited.

"Mamma," she called, but there was no answer; only a sound fainter than a rustle, like a shoe scraped along the floor.

A few minutes later, when her mother came upstairs, they called the valet de chambre and went through the rooms together, but there was no one. Then they stood side by side in the open door to their balcony and looked

out on the lake with the bright cluster of Evian on the French shore and the white caps of snow on the mountains.

"I think we've been here long enough," said Mrs. Schwartz suddenly. "I think I'll take John back to the States this fall."

Fifi was aghast. "But I thought John and I were going to the Sorbonne in Paris?"

"How can I trust him in Paris? And how could I leave you behind alone there?"

"But we're used to living in Europe now. Why did I learn to talk French? Why, mamma, we don't even know any people back home any more."

"We can always meet people. We always have."

"But you know it's different; everybody is so bigoted there. A girl hasn't the chance to meet the same sort of men, even if there were any. Everybody just watches everything you do."

"So they do here," said her mother. "That Mr. Weicker just stopped me in the hall; he saw you come in with John, and he talked to me about how you must keep out of the bar, you were so young. I told him you only took lemonade, but he said it didn't matter; scenes like tonight made people leave the hotel."

"Oh, how perfectly mean!"

"So I think we better go back home."

The empty word rang desolately in Fifi's ears. She put her arms around her mother's waist, realizing that it was she and not her mother, with her mother's clear grip on the past, who was completely lost in the universe. On the sofa her brother snored, having already entered the world of the weak, of the leaners together, and found its fetid and mercurial warmth sufficient. But Fifi kept looking at the alien sky, knowing that she could pierce it and find her own way through envy and corruption. For the first time she seriously considered marrying Borowki immediately.

"Do you want to go downstairs and say good night to the boys?" suggested her mother. "There's lots of them still there asking where you are."

But the Furies were after Fifi now—after her childish complacency and her innocence, even after her beauty—out to break it all down and drag it in any convenient mud. When she shook her head and walked sullenly into her bedroom, they had already taken something from her forever.

## II

The following morning Mrs. Schwartz went to Mr. Weicker's office to report the loss of two hundred dollars in American money. She had left the sum on her chiffonier upon retiring; when she awoke, it was gone. The door of the apartment had been bolted, but in the morning the bolt was found drawn, and yet neither of her children was awake. Fortunately, she had taken her jewels to bed with her in a chamois sack.

Mr. Weicker decided that the situation must be handled with care. There were not a few guests in the hotel who were in straitened circumstances

and inclined to desperate remedies, but he must move slowly. In America one has money or hasn't; in Europe the heir to a fortune may be unable to stand himself a haircut until the collapse of a fifth cousin, yet be a sure risk and not to be lightly offended. Opening the office copy of the Almanack de Gotha, Mr. Weicker found Stanislas Karl Joseph Borowki hooked firmly on to the end of a line older than the crown of St. Stephen. This morning, in riding clothes that were smart as a hussar's uniform, he had gone riding with the utterly correct Miss Howard. On the other hand, there was no doubt as to who had been robbed, and Mr. Weicker's indignation began to concentrate on Fifi and her family, who might have saved him this trouble by taking themselves off some time ago. It was even conceivable that the dissipated son, John, had nipped the money.

In all events, the Schwartzes were going home. For three years they had lived in hotels—in Paris, Florence, St. Raphael, Como, Vichy, La Baule, Lucerne, Baden-Baden and Biarritz. Everywhere there had been schools—always new schools—and both children spoke in perfect French and scrawny fragments of Italian. Fifi had grown from a large-featured child of fourteen to a beauty; John had grown into something rather dismal and lost. Both of them played bridge, and somewhere Fifi had picked up tap dancing. Mrs. Schwartz felt that it was all somehow unsatisfactory, but she did not know why. So, two days after Fifi's party, she announced that they would pack their trunks, go to Paris for some new fall clothes and then go home.

That same afternoon Fifi came to the bar to get her phonograph, left there the night of her party. She sat up on a high stool and talked to the barman while she drank a ginger ale.

"Mother wants to take me back to America, but I'm not going."

"What will you do?"

"Oh, I've got a little money of my own, and then I may get married." She sipped her ginger ale moodily.

"I hear you had some money stolen," he remarked. "How did it happen?"

"Well, Count Borowki thinks the man got into the apartment early and hid in between the two doors between us and the next apartment. Then, when we were asleep, he took the money and walked out."

"Ha!"

Fifi sighed. "Well, you probably won't see me in the bar any more."

"We'll miss you, Miss Schwartz."

Mr. Weicker put his head in the door, withdrew it and then came in slowly.

"Hello," said Fifi coldly.

"A-ha, young lady." He wagged his finger at her with affected facetiousness. "Didn't you know I spoke to your mother about your coming in to the bar? It's merely for your own good."

"I'm just having a ginger ale," she said indignantly.



"But no one can tell what you're having. It might be whisky or what not. It is the other guests who complain."

She stared at him indignantly—the picture was so different from her own—of Fifi as the lively center of the hotel, of Fifi in clothes that ravished the eye, standing splendid and unattainable amid groups of adoring men. Suddenly Mr. Weicker's obsequious, but hostile, face infuriated her.

"We're getting out of this hotel!" she flared up. "I never saw such a narrow-minded bunch of people in my life; always criticizing everybody and making up terrible things about them, no matter what they do themselves. I think it would be a good thing if the hotel caught fire and burned down with all the nasty cats in it."

Banging down her glass, she seized the phonograph case and stalked out of the bar.

In the lobby a porter sprang to help her, but she shook her head and hurried on through the salon, where she came upon Count Borowki.

"Oh, I'm so furious!" she cried. "I never saw so many old cats! I just told Mr. Weicker what I thought of them!"

"Did someone dare to speak rudely to you?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter. We're going away."

"Going away!" He started. "When?"

"Right away. I don't want to, but mamma says we've got to."

"I must talk to you seriously about this," he said. "I just called your room. I have brought you a little engagement present."

Her spirits returned as she took the handsome gold-and-ivory cigarette case engraved with her initials.

"How lovely!"

"Now, listen; what you tell me makes it more important that I talk to you immediately. I have just received another letter from my mother. They have chosen a girl for me in Budapest—a lovely girl, rich and beautiful and of my own rank who would be very happy at the match, but I am in love with you. I would never have thought it possible, but I have lost my heart to an American."

"Well, why not?" said Fifi, indignantly. "They call girls beautiful here if they have one good feature. And then, if they've got nice eyes or hair, they're usually bow-legged or haven't got nice teeth."

"There is no flaw or fault in you."

"Oh, yes," said Fifi modestly. "I got a sort of big nose. Would you know I was Jewish?"

With a touch of impatience, Borowki came back to his argument: "So they are bringing pressure to bear for me to marry. Questions of inheritance depend on it."

"Besides, my forehead is too high," observed Fifi abstractedly. "It's so high it's got sort of wrinkles in it. I knew an awfully funny boy who used to call me 'the highbrow.'"

"So the sensible thing," pursued Borowki, "is for us to marry immediately. I tell you frankly there are other American girls not far from here who wouldn't hesitate."

Fifi snapped the cigarette case open and shut.

"Mamma would be about crazy," Fifi said.

"I've thought about that too," he answered her eagerly. "Don't tell her. In Switzerland we'd have to wait a week according to the law. But if we drove over the border into Liechtenstein tonight we could be married tomorrow morning. Then we come back and you show your mother the little gilt coronets painted on your luggage. My own personal opinion is that she'll be delighted. There you are, off her hands, with social position second to none in Europe. In my opinion, your mother has probably thought of it already, and may be saying to herself: 'Why don't those two young people just take matters into their own hands and save me all the fuss and expense of a wedding?' I think she would like us for being so hard-boiled."

He broke off impatiently as Lady Capps-Karr, emerging from the dining room with her Pekingese, surprised them by stopping at their table. Count Borowki was obliged to introduce them. As he had not known of the Marquis Kinkallow's defection the other evening, nor that His Lordship had taken a wound over the Simplon pass the following morning, he had no suspicion of what was coming.

"I've noticed Miss Schwartz," said the Englishwoman in a clear, concise voice. "And of course I've noticed Miss Schwartz's clothes."

"Won't you sit down?" said Fifi.

"No, thank you." She turned to Borowki. "Miss Schwartz's clothes make us all appear somewhat drab. I always refuse to dress elaborately in hotels. It seems such rotten taste. Don't you think so?"

"I think people always ought to look nice," said Fifi, flushing.

"Naturally. I merely said that I consider it rotten taste to dress elaborately, save in the houses of one's friends."

She said "Good-by-e-e" to Borowki and moved on, emitting a mouthed cloud of smoke and a faint fragrance of whisky.

The insult had been as stinging as the crack of a whip, and as Fifi's pride of her wardrobe was swept away from her, she heard all the comments that she had not heard, in one great resurgent whisper. Then they said that she wore her clothes here because she had nowhere else to wear them. That was why the Howard girl considered her vulgar and did not care to know her.

For an instant her anger flamed up against her mother for not telling her, but she saw that her mother did not know either.

"I think she's so dowdy," she forced herself to say aloud, but inside she was quivering. "What is she, anyhow? I mean, how high is her title? Very high?"

"She's the widow of a baronet."

"Is that high?" Fifi's face was rigid. "Higher than a countess?"

"No. A countess is much higher—infininitely higher." He moved his chair closer and began to talk intently.

Half an hour later Fifi got up with indecision on her face.

"At seven you'll let me know definitely," Borowki said, "and I'll be ready with a car at ten."

Fifi nodded. He escorted her across the room and saw her vanish into a dark hall mirror in the direction of the lift.

As he turned away, Lady Capps-Karr, sitting alone over her coffee, spoke to him:

"I want a word with you. Did you, by some slip of the tongue, suggest to Weicker that in case of difficulties I would guarantee your bills?"

Borowki flushed. "I may have said something like that, but—"

"Well, I told him the truth—that I never laid eyes on you until a fortnight ago."

"I, naturally, turned to a person of equal rank—"

"Equal rank! What cheek! The only titles left are English titles. I must ask you not to make use of my name again."

He bowed. "Such inconveniences will soon be for me a thing of the past."

"Are you getting off with that vulgar little American?"

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly.

"Don't be angry. I'll stand you a whisky-and-soda. I'm getting in shape for Bopes Kinkallow, who's just telephoned he's tottering back here. He and his chauffeur and his vallet stopped off in Sierre and have been lying there ever since in a stupor. But he's run out of "happies", so he's arriving tonight."

Meanwhile, upstairs, Mrs. Schwartz was saying to Fifi: "Now that I know we're going away I'm getting excited about it. It will be so nice seeing the Hirsts and Mrs. Bell and Amy and Marjorie and Gladys again, and the new baby. You'll be happy, too; you've forgotten how they're like. You and Gladys used to be great friends. And Marjorie—"

"Oh, mamma, don't talk about it," cried Fifi miserably. "I can't go back."

"We needn't stay. If John was in a college like his father wanted, we could, maybe, go to California."

But for Fifi all the romance of life was rolled up into the last three impressionable years in Europe. She remembered the tall guardsmen in Rome and the old Spaniard who had first made her conscious of her beauty at the Villa d'Este at Como, and the French naval aviator at St. Raphael who had dropped her a note from his plane into their garden, and the feeling that she had sometimes, when she danced with Borowki, that he was dressed in gleaming boots and a white-furred dolman.

She had seen many American moving pictures and she knew that the girls there always married the faithful boy from the old home town, and after that there was nothing.

"I won't go," she said aloud.

Her mother turned with a pile of clothes in her arms. "What talk is that from you, Fifi? You think I could leave you here alone?" As Fifi didn't answer, she continued, with an air of finality: "That talk doesn't sound nice from you. Now you stop fretting and saying such things, and get me this list of things uptown, and later we can have tea at Nussneger's."

But Fifi had decided. It was Borowki, then, and the chance of living fully and adventurously. He could go into the diplomatic service, and then one day when they encountered Lady Capps-Karr and Miss Howard at a legation ball, she could make audible the observation that for the moment seemed so necessary to her: "I hate people who always look as if they were going to or from a funeral."

"So run along," her mother continued. "And look in at that café and see if John is up there, and take him to tea."

Fifi accepted the shopping list mechanically. Then she went into her room and wrote a little note to Borowki which she would leave with the concierge on the way out.

Coming out, she saw her mother struggling with a trunk, and felt terribly sorry for her. But there were Amy and Gladys in America, and Fifi hardened herself.

She walked out and down the stairs, remembering halfway that in her distraction she had omitted an official glance in the mirror; but there was a large mirror on the wall just outside the grand salon, and she stopped in front of that instead.

She was beautiful—she learned that once more, but now it made her sad. She wondered whether the dress she wore this afternoon was in bad taste, whether it would minister to the superiority of Miss Howard or Lady Capps-Karr. It seemed to her a lovely dress, soft and gentle in cut, but in color a hard, bright, metallic powder blue.

Then a sudden sound broke the stillness of the gloomy hall and Fifi stood suddenly breathless and motionless.

III

At eleven o'clock Mr. Weicker was tired, but the bar was in one of its periodical riots and he was waiting for it to quiet down. There was nothing to do in the stale office or the empty lobby; and the salon, where all day he held long conversations with lonely English and American women, was deserted; so he went out the front door and began to make the circuit of the hotel. Whether due to his circumambient course or to his

frequent glances up at the twinkling bedroom lights and into the humble, grilled windows of the kitchen floor, the promenade gave him a sense of being in control of the hotel, of being adequately responsible, as though it were a ship and he was surveying it from a quarterdeck.

He went past a flood of noise and song from the bar, past a window where two bus boys sat on a bunk and played cards over a bottle of Spanish wine. There was a phonograph somewhere above, and a woman's form blocked out a window; then there was the quiet wing, and turning the corner, he arrived back at his point of departure. And in front of the hotel, under the dim porte-cochère light, he saw Count Borowki.

Something made him stop and watch—something incongruous—Borowki, who couldn't pay his bill, had a car and a chauffeur. He was giving the chauffeur some sort of detailed instructions, and then Mr. Weicker perceived that there was a bag in the front seat, and came forward into the light.

"You are leaving us, Count Borowki?"

Borowki started at the voice. "For the night only," he answered. "I'm going to meet my mother."

"I see."

Borowki looked at him reproachfully. "My trunk and hat box are in my room, you'll discover. Did you think I was running away from my bill?"

"Certainly not. I hope you will have a pleasant journey and find your mother well."

But inside he took the precaution of dispatching a valet de chambre to see if the baggage was indeed there, and even to give it a thoughtful heft, lest its kernel were departed.

He dozed for perhaps an hour. When he woke up, the night concierge was pulling at his arm and there was a strong smell of smoke in the lobby. It was some moments before he could get it through his head that one wing of the hotel was on fire.

Setting the concierge at the alarms, he rushed down the hall to the bar, and through the smoke that poured from the door he caught sight of the burning billiard table and the flames licking along the floor and flaring up in alcoholic ecstasy every time a bottle on the shelves cracked with the heat. As he hastily retreated he met a line of half-dressed chasseurs and bus boys already struggling up from the lower depths with buckets of water. The concierge shouted that the fire department was on its way. He put two men at the telephones to awaken the guests, and as he ran back to form a bucket line at the danger point, he thought for the first time of Fifi.

Blind rage consumed him—with a precocious Indian-like cruelty she had carried out her threat. Ah, he would deal with that later; there was still law in the cantons. Meanwhile a clangor outdoors announced that the engines had arrived, and he made his way back through the lobby, filled now with men in pajamas carrying brief cases, and women in bedclothes carrying jewel boxes and small dogs; the number swelling every minute and the talk rising from a cadence heavy with sleep to the full staccato buzz of an afternoon soirée.

A chasseur called Mr. Weicker to the phone, but the manager shook him off impatiently.

"It's the commissioner of police," the boy persisted. "He says you must speak to him."

With an exclamation, Mr. Weicker hurried into the office. "'Allo!"

"I'm calling from the station. Is this the manager of the Hotel Trois Mondes?"

"Yes, but there's a fire here."

"Have you among your guests a man calling himself Count Borowki?"

"Why, yes—"

"We're bringing him there for identification. He was picked up on the road on some information we received."

"But—"

"We picked up a girl with him. We're bringing them both down there immediately."

"I tell you—"

The receiver clicked briskly in his ear and Mr. Weicker hurried back to the lobby, where the smoke was diminishing. The reassuring pumps had been at work for five minutes and the bar was a wet charred ruin. Mr. Weicker began passing here and there among the guests, tranquilizing and persuading; the phone operators began calling the rooms again, advising such guests as had not appeared that it was safe to go back to bed; and then, at the continued demands for an explanation, he thought again of Fifi, and this time of his own accord he hurried to the phone.

Mrs. Schwartz's anxious voice answered; Fifi wasn't there. That was what he wanted to know. He rang off brusquely. There was the story, and he could not have wished for anything more sordidly complete—an incendiary blaze and an attempted elopement with a man wanted by the police. It was time for paying, and all the money of America couldn't make any difference. If the season was ruined, at least Fifi would have no more seasons at all. She would go to a girls' institution where the prescribed uniform was rather plainer than any clothing she had ever worn.

As the last of the guests departed into the elevators, leaving only a few curious rummagers among the soaked débris, another procession came in by the front door. There was a man in civilian clothes and a little wall of policemen with two people behind. The commissioner spoke and the screen of policemen parted.

"I want you to identify these two people. Has this man been staying here under the name of Borowki?"

Mr. Weicker looked. "He has."

"He's been wanted for a year in Italy, France and Spain. And this girl?"

She was half hidden behind Borowki, her head hanging, her face in shadow. Mr. Weicker craned toward her eagerly. He was looking at Miss Howard.

A wave of horror swept over Mr. Weicker. Again he craned his head forward, as if by the intensity of his astonishment he could convert her into Fifi, or look through her and find Fifi. But this would have been difficult, for Fifi was far away. She was in front of the café, assisting the stumbling and reluctant John Schwartz into a taxi. "I should say you can't go back. Mother says you should come right home."

IV

Count Borowki took his incarceration with a certain grace, as though, having lived so long by his own wits, there was a certain relief in having his days planned by an external agency. But he resented the lack of intercourse with the outer world, and was overjoyed when, on the fourth day of his imprisonment, he was led forth to find Lady Capps-Karr.

"After all," she said, "a chep's a chep and a chum's a chum, whatever happens. Luckily, our consul here is a friend of my father's, or they wouldn't have let me see you. I even tried to get you out on bail, because I told them you went to Oxford for a year and spoke English perfectly, but the brutes wouldn't listen."

"I'm afraid there's no use," said Count Borowki gloomily. "When they've finished trying me I'll have had a free journey all over Europe."

"But that's not the only outrageous thing," she continued. "Those idiots have thrown Bopes and me out of the Trois Mondes, and the authorities are trying to get us to leave the city."

"What for?"

"They're trying to put the full blame of that tiresome fire on us."

"Did you start it?"

"We did set some brandy on fire because we wanted to cook some potato chips in alcohol, and the bartender had gone to bed and left us there. But you'd think, from the way the swine talk, that we'd come there with the sole idea of burning everyone in their beds. The whole thing's an outrage and Bopes is furious. He says he'll never come here again. I went to the consulate and they agreed that the whole affair was perfectly disgraceful, and they've wired the Foreign Office, and I've phoned Sir George Munready at Bearne, who happens to be a personal friend of mine."

Borowki considered for a moment. "If I could be born over again," he said slowly, "I think without any doubt I should choose to be born an Englishman."

"I could choose to be anything but an American! By the way, the Taylors are not presenting Miss Howard at court because of the disgraceful way the newspapers played up the matter."

"What puzzles me is what made Fifi suspicious," said Borowki.

"Then it was Miss Schwartz who blabbed?"

"Yes. I thought I had convinced her to come with me, and I knew that if she didn't, I had only to snap my fingers to the other girl... That very afternoon Fifi visited the jeweler's and discovered I'd paid for the

cigarette case with a hundred-dollar American note I'd lifted from her mother's chiffonier. She went straight to the police."

"Without coming to you first! After all, a chep's a chep—"

"But what I want to know is what made her suspicious enough to investigate, what turned her against me."

Fifi, at that moment sitting on a high stool in a hotel bar in Paris and sipping a lemonade, was answering that very question to an interested bartender.

"I was standing in the hall looking in the mirror," she said, "and I heard him talking to the English lady—the one who set the hotel on fire. And I heard him say, 'After all, my one nightmare is that she'll turn out to look like her mother.'" Fifi's voice blazed with indignation. "Well, you've seen my mother, haven't you?"

"Yes, and a very fine woman she is."

"After that I knew there was something the matter with him, and I wondered how much he'd paid for the cigarette case. So I went up to see. They showed me the bill he paid with."

"And you will go to America now?" the barman asked.

Fifi finished her glass; the straw made a gurgling sound in the sugar at the bottom.

"We've got to go back and testify, and we'll stay a few months anyhow." She stood up. "Bye-bye; I've got a fitting."

They had not got her—not yet. The Furies had withdrawn a little and stood in the background with a certain gnashing of teeth. But there was plenty of time.

Yet, as Fifi tottered out through the lobby, her face gentle with new hopes, her lovely body shining through he closes,—as she went out looking for completion under the impression that she was going to the couturier, there was a certain doubt among the eldest and most experienced of the Furies if they would get her, after all.

Published in The Saturday Evening Post magazine (31 January 1931).