

FAMILY

WHILE Alice packed clothes into the two suitcases, her own and Virginia's, Grant strolled up and down the room, warm in the summer sunshine, talking, and Virginia came in sometimes from the verandah where she had made a house in a corner.

Alice packed slowly, although it was almost time to go; she was reluctant to go; and she was interested in what Grant was saying. Nowadays she was always interested in what he said to her; he didn't talk about anything that didn't seem worthwhile to him, and his standard now at last and gradually, was hers.

"... when you consider that the function of the novel is to interpret people. Help us to understand each other..." He looked at her, but he saw all the characters in the book he had just closed, and his eyes had the abstracted look she knew so well. She said, tucking some small pyjamas firmly into a corner of Virginia's case:

"And ourselves; to help us to adjust ourselves..." and he said, "Of course."

She was reluctant to go, although as a rule she loved a change, a holiday. She didn't like the separation from Grant—but that was only a week. The real reason was that she knew before she started that there was going to be failure, as there had been last time—and the time before that. She didn't admit it, even to herself, but she knew it all the same, and the knowledge influenced her mood. She wouldn't think, she wouldn't remember, she was even a little excited about going, about seeing them again, but all the time she knew. Habit is so strong. It can sometimes over-ride reason. For so many years, home—her parents' home—had been habit. It was natural to go back. The habit of being with Grant was the stronger now, but still the other had some force, some pull, that took her back each year, hopeful.

A YEAR before she had come back from the last holiday, depressed, full of remorse, and disappointment, and frustration, and it had been a long time before she found herself again. Then she had gradually slipped back into the satisfying life Grant and Virginia made for her, and she had made excuses, for herself, and for her parents, and she had told herself that next time would be different. She would go back to what she had been, she would be like them, if it

would make them happy. She owed it to them. She was their only child. Virginia was their only grandchild. It seemed that the only way not to hurt them was to break with them altogether. Impossible to do that, and she didn't want to. Part of her didn't. How difficult to be single-minded, honest, perhaps ruthless, about human relationships. They were too complex. She was mixed up in her mind about that; wasn't it better to be in everything honest? To hold to truth? And it was the truth that there was nothing of love left in her for her parents. That wasn't her fault; it wasn't theirs. They were as they had been created, and then moulded by circumstances; so was she. It had been her tremendous luck to have Grant to

(Written for "The Listener"
by S. MORRISON JONES)

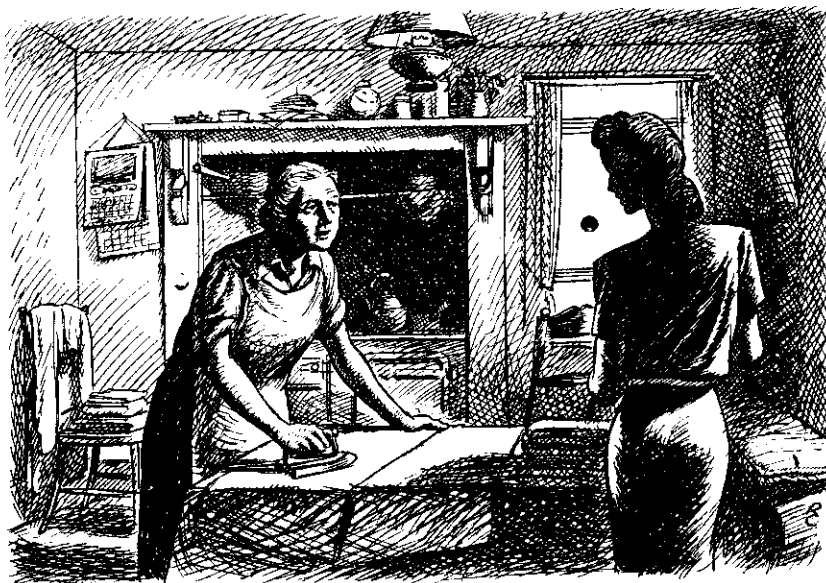
almost conquered it. There was her father's splendid constitution, and a grandmother's good taste in dress; from somewhere she had the red-bronze hair, and the fine straight nose, and the too-heavy brows. And probably every feeling of anger, of pettiness, of generosity, she had ever known had been felt again and again by those who had gone towards the making of her, and she was no more to be blamed for her faults than to be praised for her virtues.

And helping to make her too was the expensive, rather stupid education which her mother had been determined she should have; had sacrificed a good deal of her own comfort that she might have it; a parent's longing for what she had wanted herself, satisfied in her child, unregarding of whether it was what was needed by the child, or best for it. And better than that was the education Grant had helped her to find for herself after they married.

She sighed and looked at Virginia, kneeling in the little house she had built round herself with rugs and cushions. Virginia is part of me, and part of Grant, and part of all the people in us; and yet she'll be an entirely different person, us and not us; a person perhaps difficult to understand and help, one to whom we may soon be strangers, as mother is to me. But no; there'll never be the same complete severance as there has been between my parents and me; because Grant and I are aware, we make ourselves think about people; think, not merely talk about them; we know it's immensely important to understand them, more important than anything else. We don't take it for granted that because we made Virginia, she must always love us. I regard Virginia as a separate individual, not just as a toy sent to save me from boredom, preening myself on the good traits she has from me, carefully ignoring the bad ones.

Grant had taught her to think like that. It was almost a religion with him, the only religion he bothered about. That each person should make the utmost effort in self-knowledge, and then in understanding others. He had changed her in a few years from a rather silly girl with a carefully acquired fondness for all the things which didn't matter much, to a woman who not only could

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"How soon Alice tired of this endless and aimless talking"

teach her true values, as he saw them, and he had singularly clear vision. And in adopting the true ones, she had to discard the false ones. She felt all that. And yet how unkind, how cruel, to turn from what had once been everything to her; to disregard all they felt for her. It was the sore spot on her happiness; that in her thoughts she was disloyal to them.

She was glad that Grant wasn't going, although she would miss him. They hadn't ever discussed it, but after the first two or three visits it had been understood that she and Virginia would go alone.

HER packing was finished, and for a moment she stood there by the bed, looking through the French windows, to where flowering cherry blossoms drifted to the grass. A charming and intelligent young woman. A human being, a bundle of inherited and acquired characteristics, which determined all she did and thought, no matter how proudly she felt she was shaping her own life. There was the independence of thought which had marked one grandfather, and the caution of another. The readiness to take offence which she had from her mother; but she had recognised that as a fault, and had

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