

Howatch OF FORTUNE

Volume 2

SIMON AND SCHUSTER • NEW YORK

In memory of my uncle, Jack Watney, 1916–1983

Copyright © 1984 by Leafree Limited

All rights reserved

including the right of reproduction
in whole or in part in any form

Published by Simon and Schuster

A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Simon & Schuster Building

Rockefeller Center

1230 Avenue of the Americas

New York, New York 10020

SIMON AND SCHUSTER and colophon are registered trademarks
of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America

The author is grateful for permission to reprint lyrics from "Walk Right Back" by Sonny
Curtis, copyright © 1960 by Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp. All rights reserved.

Contents

PART THREE (Concluded)	JOHN:	1921-1928	473
PART FOUR	KESTER:	1928-1939	493
PART FIVE	HARRY:	1939-1952	669
PART SIX	HAL:	1966 and afterward	905

11

I

"I'LL TELEPHONE the Home of the Assumption," said Warburton.

"No. Absolutely not."

"But my dear John, it's the very best home in the district for mental cases—"

"He's never going to set foot in it."

"But what are you going to do with him?"

The district nurse arrived. I left her with Warburton and my father in the attics and ran downstairs to telephone Bronwen. By that time Thomas had returned from searching the grounds, so I sent him away in my car to fetch her.

When I returned to the attics I found the district nurse looking flushed and Warburton more troubled than ever.

"He won't budge, John, and I'm afraid he might be violent if I try to give him an injection."

"Wait." I bent over my father to coax him to his feet, but he behaved as if he were stone-deaf. I tried to take the album away from him, but he pushed me off savagely and hugged it to his chest.

"John, I know this is very upsetting for you, but—"

"Shut up."

I went on trying unsuccessfully to communicate with my father, and I was still trying when Bronwen walked in. I noticed that the district nurse immediately pursed her lips in disapproval, but Warburton said, "Mrs. Morgan, can you please convince John that his father must be taken to a place where he can receive the proper medical care?"

Bronwen said in English, "We're going to look after him at home." Then

she said in Welsh to my father, "You can't understand what they say, can you?"

He looked up at her. She knelt beside him and pointed to the album. "Please can I see your photographs?" she said. "Please will you come with me so that we can look at them together?"

He went on gazing at her in wonder, but very slowly his wrinkled trembling old hand slid into hers. I helped him to his feet and while Warburton and the nurse looked on with incredulity we led him downstairs and took him home.

II

"That arch-cunt Straker!" said Thomas. "How could she have walked out on him like that?"

We were back at Oxmoon an hour later. My father, still trustfully holding Bronwen's hand in Blanche's old room at the Manor, had allowed Warburton to administer a sedative. A day nurse and a night nurse had been requested from the Swansea agency that was providing additional nursing for Robert. Mrs. Wells had risen to the occasion with her usual aplomb and even the vicar had called with a dutiful futility; I was aware of Penhale vibrating with excitement as gossip and rumor reached fever pitch.

At Oxmoon the constable reported that the servants had named the vandals, and as he bicycled away to make his arrests I realized with a sinking heart that I now had no further excuse for delaying my investigation of Milly Straker's reign.

"Bloody bitch," said Thomas, kicking his heel into the carpet to relieve his feelings. "I hate all women."

"Well, fortunately for us men not all women are like Milly Straker."

"Sez you. Personally I'd rather fuck sheep."

This remark, very typical of Thomas at his most disturbed, was not intended to be taken seriously so I merely said in a mild voice, "Really? I don't think I'd care for all the wool," and headed towards the green baize door.

"Where are we going?"

"We're going to make a preliminary survey of what I'm very much afraid is a catastrophe. I shouldn't think for one moment that woman's left any incriminating evidence of embezzlement behind, but we must make sure."

The housekeeper's room, Milly's office on the ground floor of the servants' quarters, proved unremarkable except for the number of unpaid bills piled beneath three large paperweights. We went upstairs to her official bedroom but it had an unused musty air. As I noted the disappearance of all her possessions, I realized she had been planning her escape for some weeks; she

had gauged the hour of disaster with precision and when the train had approached the edge of the cliff she had nimbly jumped clear. Rage swept over me again but I controlled it. Rage was a luxury I could not afford. There was no time. "Thomas, I'm going to have to search Papa's room before the servants start poking around and discovering God-knows-what. Do you want to come with me or would you prefer to wait downstairs?"

"I'll come with you," said my watchdog, and beyond the fierce exterior I glimpsed a shocked and frightened youth who was not yet twenty-one.

We left the servants' wing by a door that connected with the back stairs, and moved in silence down the long passage to the other end of the house.

"The place is in a bad way, isn't it?" said Thomas suddenly, looking at the peeling wallpaper. "Maybe there are even rats in the library, just as there were when Oxmoon went to pieces under Bryn-Davies."

"I don't think we've sunk that low this time," I said, but a search of the bedroom soon changed my mind. I knew then that there were more repulsive symbols than rats of degeneration and decay.

"Jesus Christ!" said my innocent little brother, blithely opening a wardrobe. "What's all this?" And we found ourselves confronted, just as I had feared, by an unspeakable collection of erotic impedimenta.

I was by that time nearly thirty-six, and the days were long since past when I had denied my sexual inclinations by adopting priggish poses, but even so I was appalled. For a moment I wished I were as ignorant as Thomas, but both before and after my second marriage I had read a great deal about sex in an effort to place my sexuality in perspective, and the result was that I knew too much to misunderstand what I now saw. My sexual relationship with Bronwen, the natural result of the extraordinary harmony of our personalities, had always been so satisfying that I had never felt the need to resort to books to learn how I might enhance the experience, but in my efforts to compensate myself for my second marriage I had felt driven to set out down many unexplored avenues, and Constance, strongly sexed herself and quite humorless enough to reduce sex to a suitable subject for research, had egged me on. However, even with Constance I had drawn certain lines. My father, in his frantic efforts to divert himself from intolerable truths, had evidently drawn no lines at all.

In a moment of revelation I saw at last why he had been unable to remain faithful to my mother. He could never have asked her to share in such perversions. He had loved her too much and would have wanted above all to protect her from such sordidness, although I thought my mother must have guessed the truth in time; her knowledge would explain her remarkable and courageous resignation which could have come only through some profound understanding of my father's dilemma.

I then experienced a second moment of revelation as I at last perceived the

conflict that had driven him inexorably toward breakdown. My father, fundamentally a good and decent man, would never have been able to forgive himself for the secret compulsions that had driven him not merely to be unfaithful to the woman he loved but to install Milly Straker at Oxmoon, a move that had ultimately led to the dissolution of his family life and the ruin of everything that had been precious to him.

Thomas was still demanding explanations but I merely ordered him to light the fire.

"But we can't burn all that stuff, John—the rubber'll make the most awful stink!"

"We'll bury what we can't burn."

Thomas set alight the housemaid's arrangement of twigs and coal in the grate and then tried to look at the pornography, but when I saw his expression I told him sharply to stop. "Spoilsport!" he muttered, but I knew he was thankful that he could abandon his perusal without a loss of face. More time passed. We toiled on.

"Get the pillowcases, would you? We'll use them to cart away the stuff we can't burn." I went on stoking the fire.

"John, you've got to tell me what all this is about, you've got to, or else I'll start imagining things, and imagining things is worse than knowing them—"

I knew he was right. I made a great effort to control myself but it was hard to find the right words and harder still to adopt the right unemotional manner. Shoving the last pictures of defecation into the flames, I straightened my back and said, "This is all connected with punishment. He seems to have welcomed physical humiliation."

"Christ! Why?"

"Guilt."

"Guilt? Oh, you mean all that mess about locking up Grandmama in the loony bin—he was always saying how guilty he felt about that. But how peculiar! Do you mean the bitch just punished him all the time with the whips and this other fantastic rubbish? Didn't sex come into it at all?"

"The greater the punishment, the greater the sexual gratification."

"Christ! But if he was so gratified why did he need that false cock over there?"

"Maybe it wasn't he who needed it."

"Christ!"

"Stop saying 'Christ' and give me a hand with the pillowcases."

We began to stow away our unspeakable booty.

"Hope the material's strong enough, John. The chains are bloody heavy."

But the pillowcases stood the strain. When they were full I poked around in the grate to make sure all the pornography had been destroyed, and then we left the room to conduct the next stage of the operation.

We buried our haul in the shadow of Humphrey de Mohun's ruined tower, covered the grave with dead leaves and retreated to the house to drink brandy. The parlormaid told me Bayliss had been taken to hospital. The glaziers were at work on the library windows. The house seemed to be slowly returning to order but the sun was now setting on the bleak landscape, and as I drank my brandy I saw the three representatives from the band of tenants trudging dourly up the drive in pursuit of justice.

So as usual there was to be no respite. Downing the rest of my brandy I told the parlormaid to show my visitors into the morning room and prepared to face still more evidence of my father's disastrous decline.

III

After promising to review all the rents I sanctioned a delay in payment until my investigations had been completed and promised I would undertake a complete investigation of the estate so that I could straighten out the muddle which had arisen from maladministration. After the men had expressed their gratitude I told them I would see every tenant to hear each grievance, and I asked them if they knew of anyone suffering hardship that required immediate alleviation.

I was told of three old women who had no fuel and of a widow with five children who lived on bread and dripping. Noting their names, I gave an assurance that their plight would be terminated at once.

"So you'll be master of Oxmoon now, Mr. John?" said Thornton of Chervale.

"My father's master while he lives," I said, "but I shall now be managing the estate on his behalf."

They all said they were glad, and I saw then that they were no different from the men at the golf club; once they had realized that I could still be treated as a normal person, they no longer felt they had no alternative but to treat me as a wicked adulterer, and their moral obligation to be hostile evaporated. Taking their leave of me courteously they retired in satisfaction to Penhale.

I was still standing in the hall, still contemplating the hair-raising but stimulating challenge of managing a large rundown estate, still straining my eyes to peer into the convoluted machinery of my wheel of fortune, when Thomas emerged from the library to say he was unable to make head or tail of the estate books.

"All right, leave them, take the car, go back to the Manor, tell Mrs. Wells I want her to take charge temporarily here and then bring her back with her

luggage. Oh, and bring a bag for yourself. You're going to be the Godwin in residence while we sort out this mess. Big houses run better if at least one member of the family is present to give the servants an incentive to behave well."

"But aren't you going to move in here yourself?"

"Papa wouldn't like it."

"Damn it, you've saved the old bugger from the loony bin, haven't you? What right's he got to complain!"

"The best right in the world—the right of an owner. Now off you go, there's a good chap, and stop making idiotic suggestions."

I got rid of him.

Then I went to the library, where a fire had now been lit, and sat thinking for a long time. After a while I found myself remembering Robert talking of putting the magic back into Oxmoon, and a very sensible, very rational, very persuasive voice in my head said: "But *I'm* the only one who can do that."

"... and Oxmoon will *rise again* on the Wheel of Fortune . . ."

I could hear Robert's voice so clearly. But then I could also so clearly hear him say, "You're the best brother a man ever had."

Blotting the future from my mind I sat down at the library table, opened the estate books and once more began to wrestle with the problems of the present.

IV

I was too exhausted to make more than a cursory examination of my father's papers, but I found his checkbook in a drawer of the table and soon discovered that every stub recorded a payment to Milly. I did stumble across correspondence from Fairfax urging financial prudence, but I stopped being grateful to him when I saw the size of his bills. I also stopped feeling grateful to my father's accommodating bank manager, Lloyd-Thomas, when I saw the profitable size of the overdraft and discovered the existence of a mortgage.

"We'll make a serious start on the mess tomorrow, Thomas," I said when he arrived back with Mrs. Wells. "I'm too tired to do more now."

"Did Milly do anything illegal?"

"I doubt it. No need. He just gave her whatever money she wanted, but by God, I'm going to fire Fairfax and remove the Oxmoon account from Lloyd-Thomas's bank! They should have given me warning long ago."

"Have they been negligent?"

"Not in a legal sense, as far as I can see. Just stupid. But I suppose they'll say in their defense that Papa's reputation as an excellent manager with a

good financial brain drove them to assume, in the absence of any glaring evidence to the contrary, that he was competent—and don't forget Papa was very fierce in tolerating no interference in his affairs. Yes, I can see Fairfax and Lloyd-Thomas being intimidated by him, but nevertheless that's no excuse for their failure to confide in me."

"I'd like to flog and hang everyone in sight," said Thomas predictably.

I patted him gently on the shoulder and returned to Penhale.

V

Harrowing days followed. I obtained the necessary power of attorney, fired Fairfax, engaged a new firm of solicitors and also a firm of accountants, renegotiated the mortgage at a new bank and waded steadily through the mire of my father's accounts. Although my father had juggled the books, often most ingeniously, to present a false impression of the estate's finances, a stark picture soon emerged of disappearing money, capital depreciation and expenditure for which no receipts could be found.

"Is he bankrupt?" said Ginevra when I knew enough to report the full extent of the disaster to her.

"No—thank God he broke down when he did. Better late than never. And thank God too he had a private fortune to draw on in addition to the estate, but nevertheless it'll take Oxmoon years to recover."

"And to think he always prided himself on being so shrewd with money!"

"No doubt he became increasingly afraid she'd leave him and he was prepared to do anything to keep her."

"But how *could* he have been so infatuated! That awful thieving tart—"

"I'm afraid the entire catastrophe only proves to the hilt Robert's belief that love isn't always accompanied by youth and beauty and a full orchestra playing 'The Blue Danube.'"

"'The Blue Danube'—oh God, that reminds me. Let's have another drink, Johnny. There's something I must tell you about Robert."

We were in the drawing room at Little Oxmoon. I had paid my daily call on Robert, but I had stayed no more than five minutes and I had not mentioned the disaster at Oxmoon. At that stage it would not have interested him. He had said goodbye to my father a long time ago and now the outside world held no meaning for him. It was too remote. Lying lifelessly in his quiet shadowed room he had wanted only to listen to me talking of the past.

"He seemed a bit brighter today," I said to Ginevra.

"That's because he's decided when to die."

After a moment I said, "Do you mean—"

"No, I'm not talking about euthanasia. Gavin says that when people are very, very ill they sometimes seem able to choose when to let go. He told Robert and said the power to choose was related to the power of the will. Robert was tremendously excited and at once started making plans."

I drank half my pink gin and said, "Which day has he chosen?"

"My birthday. April the twenty-third."

"But why on earth—"

"He always said that was the day on which he first began to live. On my eighteenth birthday in 1898 Robert fell in love with me. We danced together beneath the chandeliers at Oxmoon while the orchestra played 'The Blue Danube.'"

I was unable to break the silence that followed. I sat motionless, staring into the fire, but after a while the flames seemed too bright. I looked away.

"He wants to end in the beginning," said Ginevra. She did not cry, and when I glanced at her I realized she was far back in the remote past, just as I was, listening to the violins playing that waltz which refused to die.

I said, "I was there."

She was amazed. "Were you? But how extraordinary! You couldn't have been more than six!"

"Special occasion. Lion and I stayed up late."

"Did you see us dancing?"

"Yes," I said. "I remember."

"Oh Johnny, you must tell him! When the end comes—"

"Yes, of course. I'll be there."

We were silent again. It was not until my drink was finished that I was able to say, "I hope Robert won't be disappointed."

"Don't worry. Gavin and I are determined that he won't be."

"Thank God."

The flames went on flickering in the grate. The firelight was kind to Ginevra, smoothing away the lines on her face and emphasizing her elegant legs, clad as usual in the sheerest of silk stockings. The only lamp in the room stood behind her, and suddenly I glimpsed again the radiant young girl who had danced long ago in the ballroom at Oxmoon when Robert's adult life had begun.

"Well," she said abruptly, "it's no use sitting around here swilling pink gin and chatting about death. I must go upstairs to Kester and you must go home to Bronwen. . . . No change in Bobby's condition, I suppose?"

"None," I said, but when I arrived home I had a surprise. After three mute weeks of recognizing no one, my father had begun to improve. Bronwen came rushing down the staircase as soon as I entered the hall.

"Johnny, wonderful news! He's asking for you!"

I agreed with genuine enthusiasm that this was wonderful but nevertheless

I was conscious of ambivalence. During the past weeks I had often looked at the mindless shell which housed my father and thought that death would be a merciful release—and not only for him; once he was dead Oxmoon would pass to Kester and I would finally be beyond the torment of temptation.

Bronwen was talking rapidly as she led the way upstairs. She told me she had looked in to see my father half an hour before in order to relieve the night nurse, who had gone downstairs to make herself some tea, and as soon as the night nurse had left my father had spoken in Welsh.

“ . . . and he said, ‘I know you but I’ve forgotten your name. You’re the pretty girl with the baby,’ and when I said yes, I was Bronwen, he said, ‘You belong to John,’ and then he asked where you were and when I said you were at Oxmoon he suddenly realized he wasn’t at home and he said, ‘Am I in the Home of the Assumption?’ and when I said no, you wouldn’t let him be sent there, I thought he was going to cry but he didn’t, and then Nurse brought the tea and he drank a cup and all the while he kept asking and asking for you . . .”

I entered Blanche’s room. My father was propped up on his pillows. His silver hair with its faint golden sheen had been carefully parted and brushed. His eyes filled with tears as he recognized me.

“Well, here he is at last!” said the nurse cozily. “Isn’t that nice!”

I got rid of her. Bronwen had already retreated. Pulling up a chair I sat down at the bedside.

“My dear Papa,” I said, “how very glad I am to see you better.” I realized with relief as I spoke that despite my past ambivalence this statement was true. It was easy to wish him dead when he was no better than a vegetable, but quite impossible not to wish him a full recovery once he was showing signs of life.

“They say I’m at Penhale Manor,” he whispered.

“That’s right. Thomas and I are looking after Oxmoon until you’re well enough to go back.”

My father looked pitifully frightened. “You mustn’t look at the books.”

“It’s all right, I’ve sorted everything out. All’s well now.”

Trembling fingers wrapped themselves around my hand in gratitude, and when I saw him trying to screw up the courage to ask the inevitable question I said as gently as I could, “I’m afraid I don’t know where Milly is, Papa. She left without leaving an address.”

“But Mrs. Wells would know where to send a letter. . . . They had mutual friends. . . .” The quavering voice trailed away.

I said evenly, “I’m afraid Milly made a great deal of trouble for you, Papa. I’m afraid she wasn’t a good friend to you in the end.”

My father nodded as if he perfectly accepted this judgment. Then a tear began to trickle down his cheek.

"Papa, believe me, I do understand how much she means to you, but—"

"I do so want Milly," said my father, the tears rolling down his cheeks. "I know you never liked her but she was so kind to me and so cheerful, always knowing how to make me laugh. I expect you thought she was only after my money, but I understood her, I knew how frightened she was of being old and alone and ending up in a workhouse as her mother did. She had a terrible childhood too, just as terrible as mine, oh, I understood it all, she used to say I was the only man who'd ever understood her and the only man she'd ever really liked. I won't give her any more money. You can continue to manage my affairs, but please, please write to Milly and ask her to come back."

"Papa—"

"You've been so good and kind, saving me from that place, I'm sorry I was so cold and unforgiving but I'll make all that up to you now, I swear I will, I'll do anything you want—alter my will—leave you all my money—why, I'll even leave you—"

I was on my feet. I heard myself saying firmly, "You can't make a will while you're still unwell, Papa. Don't worry about that now. Your first task is to get better."

"But if you could get Milly back—"

"If I do, it would only be because I know how terrible it is to be deprived of someone you love. It wouldn't be because I'm looking for repayment."

"But you'll do it? You'll get her back?"

"I'll try."

VI

"You can't!"

"You're mad—she'll never come!"

The reactions of Thomas and Ginevra were predictable but they were wrong. She came. I met her at the station two weeks later. She wore a smart black coat with fox furs, and a little hat with a prim veil. She was accompanied by a mountain of very expensive leather luggage.

"Well, dear," she said, "life's full of surprises, isn't it? I'm sure we never thought *we'd* meet again! Never mind, I've had a lovely holiday and invested some money for my old age and now I feel ready for anything. I did meet a man who offered me a little house in Putney but neither he nor the house appealed—Oxmoon's ruined me, that's my trouble, Oxmoon and Bobby. Nothing but the best will do for *me* now, thanks very much! I wish I hadn't grabbed so much before I left, I know I was naughty, but when you're a woman old age is always just around the corner and if you've got no money

you may as well cut your throat and be done with it. God, it's bloody hell being a woman, always at the mercy of men who treat you like horseshit—pardon my French—but that was what was so special about Bobby, always so charming, always such a gentleman, he *never* treated me like horseshit—no, nothing was too good for me where Bobby was concerned, nothing at all.

"I'm sorry he's been so bad. Mabel Wells wrote to me via Lily in Wandsworth to tell me what was going on, and I kept thinking of him. Of course you all probably thought I was drinking champagne in Monte Carlo and not giving a damn, but you were wrong. I thought of him. Poor old Bobby. Yes, I've missed him, and my God, I've missed that awful inconvenient old house too—oh, how I loved the *power* of being in charge there—God, I could give up food, drink and sex and just live on power alone, really I could. In fact if ever I'm reincarnated I'm going to ask God to let me come back as master of Oxmoon—not mistress, mind you, but master. Of course no one in their right mind would want to be reincarnated as a woman."

We traveled out of Swansea and headed through the narrow lanes into the heart of Gower. A gust of rain buffeted the car but it was only a spring shower and the next moment the sun was shining on the walls of Penrice as we passed the turning to the sea.

"How's that nice girl of yours? Not pregnant again, I hope? People get such funny ideas about having babies, it beats me, I've never been able to see the attraction myself. And talking of babies, how's little Thomas? Has he managed to get together with Mabel Wells since the two of them have been on their own at Oxmoon? Mabel was so coy about him in her letter that my hopes were raised—it would be so nice for her, wouldn't it, and the best possible thing for him. There's something a bit off-color there, but nothing Mabel can't cure. Funny how Mabel likes young men. I've never been able to understand it myself, all that noisy thrashing around and then behaving afterwards as if they've achieved some sort of miracle. Give me an older man any day, I say. They may still be just as self-centered—what man isn't?—but at least you've got some chance of uncovering a bit of sophistication . . ."

We reached the hamlet of Middleton and turned off along the road to Penhale. Another squall hit the car as we approached Oxmoon, and to our left on the Downs the wild ponies huddled together against the wind which was hurtling across the heather from the invisible sea.

"Ah, there's Oxmoon, nasty great brute of a house—oh, how I love it! No, I really shouldn't have been happy at all in that cheap little villa in Putney . . ."

We arrived at the Manor but I was too relieved that the journey was over to do more than take her straight upstairs to my father's room.

"*Milly!*" shouted my father as she walked in, and for a brief moment he was young again, ablaze with vitality, his face radiant with happiness. That

was when I knew he would recover sufficiently to be capable of making a new valid will in my favor. "Oh, Milly, how wonderful to see you! Milly, I want to go home but the doctor says I must live quietly here for a time and there's a nurse who treats me as if I'm a baby, and I can't quite work out how I'm ever going to escape—"

"Don't you worry, my poppet," said Milly, giving him an affectionate kiss. "You just leave it all to me."

VII

My dilemma finally overwhelmed me.

Retreating to my room, I asked myself how I, a weak, divided and thoroughly unheroic man who seemed to spend most of his time in a state of moral confusion, could even attempt to play the hero's role that fate was so obviously trying to assign to me. How did I resist accepting Oxmoon? Of course my father was still of unsound mind and might feel less generous when he was fully recovered, but in fact had he not been irrationally guilty about that seduction which had happened over thirty years before? And had I perhaps yielded my most cherished ambition not out of logic but for emotional reasons which had become increasingly irrelevant as time went on? I had been shocked and revolted when I heard of my father's behavior with Ginevra; it was natural that I should have responded by insisting that my father expiated his crime by giving Robert what Robert wanted. But hadn't my father now suffered enough for his past wrongs? And was it right that the present and future welfare of Oxmoon should be sacrificed because of a past incident which was best forgotten?

Oxmoon was the challenge I needed. Oxmoon could satisfy my ambition. I was tailor-made for Oxmoon, and now Oxmoon was surely waiting for me, waiting for the man who alone of all the family had the brains and the ability to restore its ailing fortunes.

Robert would never know of my betrayal, of course. He would die happy, convinced I would stand by his idealistic, moving but fundamentally impracticable dying wish that he could pass to his son his magic house and the life that might have been. Ginevra would be angry at first but I thought it unlikely that she would mind much in the end; she would be certain to return to London once Robert was dead, so why should she want to be saddled with Oxmoon? And as for Kester . . . well, Kester would undoubtedly be much happier in London with his mother. Naturally some sort of financial reparation would have to be made—and it went without saying that I'd bend over backwards to be generous—but I saw no reason why Kester should miss Ox-

moon. How could he? He had never lived there. It hadn't been bred into his soul as it had been bred into mine.

I thought of soft, girlish little Kester. Without doubt he would be a disaster for Oxmoon. I thought of my bold adventurous Harry, following in my foot-steps with ease.

The truth was that for Harry's sake—and for the sake of Oxmoon—I really had to accept my father's wishes if he decided—when he decided—to change his will. It was my moral duty. My father would understand that, of course, if—when—I explained it to him. Yes, he would see just as clearly as I now saw that he had to make me his heir; as my mother would have said, it was the right thing—indeed, the only thing—to do. . . .

VIII

"It would be wrong," said Bronwen.

"I know." I covered my face with my hands. "It would mean cheating Robert, cheating Ginevra, cheating Kester, but oh God, how do I draw the line and stand by it, I'm so terrified I won't be strong enough—"

"I think you will be."

"But I'm so weak, you know how weak I am—"

"I think that in the end you'll be strong."

"But Bronwen—"

"Don't despair. Go on loving Robert and being truthful with him. Then when he dies I think the pattern of love and truth will alter and re-form in an automatic act of magic and you'll be safe."

"I—simply—can't—imagine—"

"I can. And you must. Have faith. Be truthful. And love him right up to the end."

IX

A few days later on the twenty-third of April, 1928, my father was still alive, thriving at Oxmoon, and Robert finally reached the end of the terrible road he had been traveling since the war.

I went to Little Oxmoon after breakfast and found Ginevra waiting for me. She was wearing green, a color that suited her, and had taken immense trouble with her appearance. Accustomed to her taste for unsuitable clothes I was surprised by her plain dress devoid of ornament. She looked tired but tranquil.