

## **CHAPTER II. - MY FIRST CIGAR.**

It was not in my chambers, but three hundred miles further north, that I learned to smoke. I think I may say with confidence that a first cigar was never smoked in such circumstances before.

At that time I was a school-boy, living with my brother, who was a man. People mistook our relations, and thought I was his son. They would ask me how my father was, and when he heard of this he scowled at me. Even to this day I look so young that people who remember me as a boy now think I must be that boy's younger brother. I shall tell presently of a strange mistake of this kind, but at present I am thinking of the evening when my brother's eldest daughter was born--perhaps the most trying evening he and I ever passed together. So far as I knew, the affair was very sudden, and I felt sorry for my brother as well as for myself.

We sat together in the study, he on an arm-chair drawn near the fire and I on the couch. I cannot say now at what time I began to have an inkling that there was something wrong. It came upon me gradually and made me very uncomfortable, though of course I did not show this. I heard people going up and down stairs, but I was not at that time naturally suspicious. Comparatively early in the evening I felt that my brother had something on his mind. As a rule, when we were left together, he yawned or drummed with his fingers on the arm of his chair to show that he did not feel uncomfortable, or I made a pretence of being at ease by playing with the dog or saying that the room was close. Then one of us would rise, remark that he had left his book in the dining-room, and go away to look for it, taking care not to come back till the other had gone. In this crafty way we helped each other. On that occasion, however, he did not adopt any of the usual methods, and though I went up to my bedroom several times and listened through the wall, I heard nothing. At last some one told me not to go upstairs, and I returned to the study, feeling that I now knew the worst. He was still in the arm-chair, and I again took to the couch. I could see by the way he looked at me over his pipe that he was wondering whether I knew anything. I don't think I ever liked my brother better than on that night; and I wanted him to understand that, whatever happened, it would make no difference between us. But the affair upstairs was too delicate to talk of, and all I could do was to try to keep his mind from brooding on it, by making him tell me things about

politics. This is the kind of man my brother is. He is an astonishing master of facts, and I suppose he never read a book yet, from a Blue Book to a volume of verse, without catching the author in error about something. He reads books for that purpose. As a rule I avoided argument with him, because he was disappointed if I was right and stormed if I was wrong. It was therefore a dangerous thing to begin on politics, but I thought the circumstances warranted it. To my surprise he answered me in a rambling manner, occasionally breaking off in the middle of a sentence and seeming to listen for something. I tried him on history, and mentioned 1822 as the date of the battle of Waterloo, merely to give him his opportunity. But he let it pass. After that there was silence. By and by he rose from his chair, apparently to leave the room, and then sat down again, as if he had thought better of it. He did this several times, always eyeing me narrowly. Wondering how I could make it easier for him, I took up a book and pretended to read with deep attention, meaning to show him that he could go away if he liked without my noticing it. At last he jumped up, and, looking at me boldly, as if to show that the house was his and he could do what he liked in it, went heavily from the room. As soon as he was gone I laid down my book. I was now in a state of nervous excitement, though outwardly I was quite calm. I took a look at him as he went up the stairs, and noticed that he had slipped off his shoes on the bottom step. All haughtiness had left him now.

In a little while he came back. He found me reading. He lighted his pipe and pretended to read too. I shall never forget that my book was "Anne Judge, Spinster," while his was a volume of "Blackwood." Every five minutes his pipe went out, and sometimes the book lay neglected on his knee as he stared at the fire. Then he would go out for five minutes and come back again. It was late now, and I felt that I should like to go to my bedroom and lock myself in. That, however, would have been selfish; so we sat on defiantly. At last he started from his chair as some one knocked at the door. I heard several people talking, and then loud above their voices a younger one.

When I came to myself, the first thing I thought was that they would ask me to hold it. Then I remembered, with another sinking at the heart, that they might want to call it after me. These, of course, were selfish reflections; but my position was a trying one. The question was, what was the proper thing for me to do? I told myself that my brother might

come back at any moment, and all I thought of after that was what I should say to him. I had an idea that I ought to congratulate him, but it seemed a brutal thing to do. I had not made up my mind when I heard him coming down. He was laughing and joking in what seemed to me a flippant kind of way, considering the circumstances. When his hand touched the door I snatched at my book and read as hard as I could. He was swaggering a little as he entered, but the swagger went out of him as soon as his eye fell on me. I fancy he had come down to tell me, and now he did not know how to begin. He walked up and down the room restlessly, looking at me as he walked the one way, while I looked at him as he walked the other way. At length he sat down again and took up his book. He did not try to smoke. The silence was something terrible; nothing was to be heard but an occasional cinder falling from the grate. This lasted, I should say, for twenty minutes, and then he closed his book and flung it on the table. I saw that the game was up, and closed "Anne Judge, Spinster." Then he said, with affected jocularly: "Well, young man, do you know that you are an uncle?" There was silence again, for I was still trying to think out some appropriate remark. After a time I said, in a weak voice. "Boy or girl?" "Girl," he answered. Then I thought hard again, and all at once remembered something. "Both doing well?" I whispered. "Yes," he said sternly. I felt that something great was expected of me, but I could not jump up and wring his hand. I was an uncle. I stretched out my arm toward the cigar-box, and firmly lighted my first cigar.