

wasn't it? Mrs. Carstairs has some money of her own. She picked up, packed up, walked out, bought a place up the river, near Hunston, and has lived there ever since."

Peter looked up quickly. "Hunston? Ha! But fire away."

"She and Uncle Elbert have stayed pretty good friends all through it. They exchange letters now and then, and once or twice when she has been in the city, I believe they have met — though not in recent years. My private suspicion is that she has never entirely got over being in love with him. Anyhow, there's their general relationship in a nutshell — parted but friendly. It might have stayed just like that till they were both in their graves, but for one accidental complication. There is a child."

"I seem to remember," said Peter. "A little boy."

"On the contrary. A little girl. Uncle Elbert," said Varney, "is a bit of a social butterfly. Mrs. Carstairs is an earnest domestic character. As I gather, that was what they clashed on — the idea of what a home ought to be. When the split came, Mrs. Carstairs took the child and Uncle Elbert was willing enough to have her do it. That was natural enough, Peter. He had his friends and his clubs and his little dinners, and he was no more competent to raise a girl baby than you are, which is certainly going some for a comparison. I suppose the fact was that he was glad to be free of the responsibility. But it's mighty different now."

"You see," said Varney, lighting one cigarette