

CHAPTER II

WHAT'S BRED IN THE BONE

The old believe everything; the middle-aged suspect everything; the young know everything.

OSCAR WILDE: Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young.

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ON the afternoon of the following day the house-party began to assemble. Deryk felt that the whole thing was rather unnecessary, and would probably be very boring at a time when he wanted to be busy tidying his books and seeing what had happened to all his possessions in the last two years. There was a pomposity, too, about his father at such times which was rather exasperating, far too much fuss and nonsense about "the return of the young heir" and the young heir's general deportment. But it was something to fill the great barrack of a house, and he had not come across any of these people for years. He entered into the enthusiasm of the servants, who were making such preparations as Ripley Court had not seen since it changed hands, for the coming-of-age celebrations four years earlier had—perhaps mercifully—been cut short by one of Sir Aylmer's sudden attacks of illness. He flitted from room to room, asking questions and pouring out suggestions; only at rare intervals did his mind revert to his father's conversation overnight. At tea-time he was discovered on the stairs, working out rough calculations on the back of an envelope.

"You'll change out of those clothes before anyone comes, won't you, Deryk?" said Sir Aylmer, with a look of disfavour at a shapeless Norfolk jacket and flannel trousers. "What are you doing there?"

Deryk smothered a sigh and wrote down the last line of figures.