

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# The Rainbow Through The Rain

Elvi Rhodes

# About the Book

The Brogdens were one of Chalywell's most important families. Old Jacob had started the family antique business when he was nine years old, going round the big houses and buying small items of bric-a-brac for pennies. Now Brogden's was famous for its beautiful furniture and pictures. But the most beautiful - and valuable - thing in Jacob's life was his granddaughter, Lois - for Lois reminded him of the daughter he had lost so tragically many years ago.

When Lois fell in love with John Farrar, the whole family were dismayed, for between Jacob and the Farrars was a deep and abiding feud that could never be mended. Lois, conscious of the storm clouds of war gathering over her future, was determined that nothing and no-one should come between her and her beloved John.

But as war broke out, as families were torn apart, Lois found her life changing irrevocably. Loyalty, love, tragedy and hope were to direct her into a future she had never dreamed of.

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**ELVI RHODES**

*The Rainbow Through  
The Rain*

*To Mary Irvine,  
agent and friend*

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O Joy that seeketh me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee,  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain  
That morn shall tearless be.

G. Matheson  
from *Hymns Ancient & Modern*



# PART ONE

# ONE

LOIS BROGDEN, SITTING AT the table reserved for her parents and their guests, right on the edge of the dance floor, gazed around the crowded ballroom and gave a long sigh of pure pleasure. She was enchanted by what she saw. It was really quite splendid, as befitted Chalywell's most glittering social event of the year. She just knew she was going to have a marvellous time.

The table was well-placed: not too near the band to drown out all conversation, but central enough to see and be seen, for the Brogdens were influential people in the town. They could be relied upon to support any event of importance. Anyone within the wide circulation area of the *Chalywell Courier* would find Councillor Herbert Brogden's name regularly near the top of the lists of subscribers to worthwhile causes. He was a three-guinea man, sometimes even a five-pound man. He was also on his way to being Mayor.

As for his wife, everyone conceded that Eileen was a wonderful helpmate for the Councillor. She practically wore her fingers to the bone on behalf of several charities and countless local associations. She was President, Chairman, Secretary, or at the very least a Committee Member, of almost everything. When the time came, she would fill the role of Mayoress with grace and purpose. She had certainly had a firm, guiding hand in the preliminaries of this evening's function.

The Parks Department of the Chalywell District Council also had done its bit. It always made a special effort for the annual *Conversazione*, that week-long marathon of events

which started with an expensive bang and gradually decreased in importance and price as the days went by and the flowers faded. Only the *crème de la crème* attended the first night.

But now the blooms were at their freshest and best; the gardeners had excelled themselves. The ballroom of the Queen's Hall was awash with flowers and greenery: window-sills, tables, pillars, no square inch which would hold an urn or a trough - or even a cunningly disguised jam jar - was left empty. The pleasant, bittersweet smell of chrysanthemums vied with Coty's L'Aimant and Yardley's lavender as the women danced by.

Although everyone said it was so, Lois was in no position to judge whether the floral effects were finer than ever. It was the first time she had been privileged to see them. By rights she should have been here last year, since she had been almost seventeen then, but a nasty attack of chicken-pox had put paid to that.

'How can *anybody* have chicken-pox at sixteen?' she'd wailed.

'Arrested development,' her brother had said, without sympathy.

But never mind, a year later here she was.

While her silver-slipped foot tapped in time to the quickstep medley of Martin Morley and his Rhythm Boys, who were positioned behind a huge bank of yellow-and-bronze chrysanthemums which decorated the entire front of the stage, so that only their upper halves were visible and they appeared as if riding a raft in a sea of flowers, she surveyed the scene.

The dancers moved vigorously. The people of Chalywell, like most Northerners, took their dancing seriously enough to do it well, but lightly enough to enjoy it thoroughly. They had a natural sense of rhythm and it was doubtful if many of them had actually been taught to dance. It was just something you picked up.

They smiled while they danced, hummed the tune, even sang the words, though of course never loudly enough to be heard above the band, at least not on this first night. They knew the words of everything and singing came as naturally to them as dancing. Life was to be enjoyed to the full, more especially as there might be a war. Last autumn some had thought that Neville Chamberlain, flying off like that to Munich, the first flight of his life, had saved the day, but now in January 1939 that no longer seemed sure. But never mind; at this moment and in this place it was doubtful if anyone was thinking of war, certainly Lois wasn't.

Philip, her brother, whizzed past with Helen, hovering only momentarily to show off some fancy footwork in front of his family. Helen Barnes was the daughter of the friends the Brogdens had invited to make up their table. Their son should have been of the party - a ready-made partner for Lois - but for some glossed-over reason, not clearly specified by his parents, he had been unable to come.

'You ought to be dancing, Lois love,' Mrs Brogden said. 'A pretty girl like you, it's not right you should be sitting out.'

'I'm all right,' Lois said. 'Aren't the dresses pretty?'

'Very nice,' Mrs Brogden conceded. 'But none nicer than yours. We were right to choose that pale lemon. It suits you.'

The dress was nipped in at the waist, with a full skirt, layers and layers of net to the ankles, and a sweetheart neckline which Lois would have liked lower but which Mrs Brogden had thought quite *décolleté* enough for a seventeen year old. The colour was perfect with her daughter's dark hair and clear skin - not everyone could wear lemon.

And I was right, Mrs Brogden congratulated herself, not to give in over the permanent wave. That lovely straight hair, thick and heavy, falling almost to her daughter's

shoulders, with a shine as if it had been polished, could have been ruined by a perm. They took the nature out of your hair. Anyway, Lois was striking enough not to need curls. Perhaps not exactly pretty, Mrs Brogden allowed, but certainly striking. She had the Brogden looks: nose slightly aquiline, dark eyes, wide mouth, high cheek-bones - in fact, rather aristocratic, her mother thought with satisfaction.

'Herbert, give Lois a turn on the floor!' she ordered.

Herbert Brogden rose to his feet and took his daughter by the hand.

'Come on then, love. Let's show 'em how it's done! But it's an "excuse me". Like as not somebody'll steal you away before we're halfway round.'

'Then you can go and steal someone else,' Lois said.

She would have been within her rights in the 'excuse me' to go and claim anyone's partner, just by a tap on the shoulder and saying the magic words, but she hadn't the courage. She *had* wondered if she might claim Philip, but he appeared to be having a good time with Helen. He wouldn't thank her for breaking it up.

Her father was a competent dancer, Lois thought as they moved around. He knew the steps, he had a sense of rhythm, and he was skilful at guiding her so that they avoided colliding with other couples on the floor. It was difficult to decide what it was he lacked. He did everything correctly, but there was no spark in his dancing. Whenever she danced, even at a run-of-the-mill church function, the whole of her body, from the top of her head to the ends of her toes, came alive. Her spine tingled. She *was* the dance, she *was* the music. Everything came together. She was fond of her father but, with the arrogance of youth, she wondered if anything had ever made his spine tingle.

They had almost circled the floor when a young man tapped her father on the arm.

'Excuse me, sir!' he said, then took Lois in his arms and bore her away. It was all done so quickly, so neatly. She

never did see the going of her father.

'A pretty girl like you,' the young man said, 'you shouldn't be dancing with an older man, depriving the rest of us!'

He was quite tall. She had to raise her head to meet his eyes.

'He's my father.'

'Whoops!' he said. 'There I go again! When we know each other better, which I'm sure we will, you'll realize I put my foot in it all the time. Don't stop to think.'

'He isn't all *that* old,' Lois said. 'And actually he's quite a good dancer.'

But he wasn't in the same class as this young man, oh no, not by a long way! It was the first time in her life she had been partnered by someone who at once changed the whole nature of dancing. It was not only that their steps matched exactly, but that they knew instinctively what the other one would do, so that there was no need for him to lead and she to follow, no need even to think. It was as if they were one entity. Although he didn't hold her unduly close, his hand resting only lightly on the back of her waist, yet they melted into each other. She came suddenly, sparkingly, alive, and she knew that he did too. It was all there.

He spoke very little, and she likewise. The dance was everything. When the music stopped it took a conscious effort to bring herself back to the reality of time and place.

'Thank you,' he said. 'You're simply the best dancer I've ever met. Can I buy you a lemonade?'

'I must go back to my table,' Lois said. 'You can come with me.'

'Then you can mark me down on your card for several more dances,' he said. 'My name's John Farrar. What's yours?'

'Lois Brogden.'

'It rings a bell,' he said. 'But I'm not sure why. I've not been in the area long. I don't know many people, do you?'

'Tons! But I've lived here ever since I was born. Chalywell's not a big place. You meet the same people all the time.'

She became conscious that the dance floor had cleared. They were standing there in isolation, on the edge of it.

'We'd better move,' Lois said. 'Thank you for the dance.'

'I've told you, I'm coming with you. I'm going to write my name in several places on your programme. That is unless it's completely full, which I'll bet it is.'

'It's not full,' Lois admitted. How could she prevent him observing that, so far, it was almost blank?

She indicated the table. The rest of the party were already seated, including Philip and Helen.

'This is John Farrar,' she said. 'My parents; Mr and Mrs Barnes, their daughter Helen and my brother Philip.'

John, smiling pleasantly, shook hands all round.

'Farrar, did you say?' Herbert Brogden asked.

'That's right, sir. I'm hoping your daughter will give me some more dances. I've already discovered she's a wonderful dancer. Does she get it from you?'

He felt certain she didn't. Her dancing was a gift straight from heaven, nothing to do with this solid-looking little man.

'I doubt that,' Herbert Brogden said. 'Not from me, though my wife was always good at it. Light as a feather!'

'Then perhaps it's you Lois has to thank,' John said, smiling at Mrs Brogden.

'Farrar,' Herbert Brogden repeated. 'It's not all that uncommon a name in these parts, but would you have anything to do with Farrar's Haulage Company? The Akersfield lot?'

'Why yes! My grandfather, George Farrar, started it, though he said *his* father was actually the first. My late grandfather, I should say. He died a few months ago.'

'I thought there was a bit of a likeness.'

'I was always reckoned to favour my grandfather,' John said. 'So, did you know him, Mr Brogden?'

'A long time ago. I was a lad.'

Brogden's tone was dismissive. He turned away and began to talk to his guests.

'Father—' Lois began.

'It's the supper dance next,' her father said. 'Remember you promised that to your brother.'

Lois opened her mouth to contradict him, then, observing his expression, thought better of it. Of course she hadn't done any such thing, and her father knew it. You didn't waste the supper dance on your brother, lose the opportunity of sitting with a favoured young man, of eating and chatting and flirting. In fact she had half-hoped, since Raymond Barnes had let her down, that her parents might invite John Farrar to join them for the refreshments, but everything in her father's manner now made it plain that he would not.

'Are you here with your family, Mr Farrar?'

Mrs Brogden broke off her conversation with the Barneses to ask the question.

'No. I'm with friends,' John said.

'Then they'll be expecting you back,' Herbert Brogden retorted brusquely.

John Farrar turned to Lois.

'If you're engaged for the supper dance, perhaps I could have the one after?'

'Of course,' Lois said. She should have given him her card to write in his name, but instead she did it herself, then quickly put the card away in her small, silver-chain bag, though by now, and partly because she felt he had been rudely treated, she no longer would have minded John seeing all those empty spaces, even allowing him to fill in as many as he wished. But first there was something she had to sort out with her father. In any case, she thought,



John no longer had pressed her for more than the one dance, and no wonder.

'Then I'll see you later,' he said.

He smiled politely at the rest of the party, and left. Lois watched him cross the floor to the far side of the ballroom, then lost sight of him. She wondered who he would ask for the supper dance. There were so many pretty girls here to choose from.

The moment the band started up again, Philip rose to his feet, and pulled Helen to hers.

'Mustn't waste good dancing time!' he commented.

'Father seems to think you booked me for this dance,' Lois said in a clear voice.

'Don't be daft!' Philip replied as they danced away.

'Father, why did you say that?' Lois asked.

He pretended not to hear.

'One man's bad luck is another man's good fortune!' Mr Barnes said with hearty gallantry. 'Now perhaps *I'll* get a look in, if you will do me the honour?'

Her father looked relieved, but he needn't think he was getting away with it, Lois thought as she moved into the dance in Mr Barnes' arms. Mr Barnes was a nice enough man, but he was quite a bit older than her father, his stomach bulged against hers in an embarrassing way, and his hands were sweaty. Fortunately he wasn't a bad dancer and she tried to concentrate on that, though all the while she was surreptitiously scanning the room for a sight of John Farrar. Once she thought she caught a glimpse of him, dancing with a pretty redhead who wore a close-fitting, low-cut dress - the kind *she* would have chosen, given a free rein - but then she lost him again in the throng.

She would have tackled her father as soon as the dance ended and they went back to the table, but now supper was being served. Waiters hovered, pouring wine, white and rather sweet, serving vegetables, removing plates. It was not the time. And when the meal ended there were

important things to be attended to. She excused herself quickly, left her coffee, picked up her bag and made for the cloakroom.

Her dance with John Farrar imminent, it was absolutely essential that she should powder her nose, titivate her hair and put on fresh lipstick. When she had done that she studied herself in the mirror.

She had done her best, but she was by no means satisfied with what she saw. No, it was more definite than that: she would have liked to look quite different, older, more sophisticated, less round in the face. She sucked in her cheeks, making hollows, but there was no way she could keep that up, not if she wished to speak from time to time. Under the disapproving eye of an older woman who was repairing her face at the next mirror she tugged hard at the bodice of her dress, trying to pull the neckline lower, wanting, however sinful it might be, to show off her bosom. She knew it was one of her best features but her mother, herself modestly and decently flat-chested, always insisted that she covered it up, camouflaged it as much as possible. To Mrs Brogden's mind a well-developed bust was vulgar. She herself felt that she owed much of her elegance to the fact that she was slender and that she wore her hair brushed severely back from her face and twisted into a chignon. She prided herself on her classic looks, in contrast to her friends, most of whom had ample flesh, constrained by armour-like corsets and rigidly waved hair.

When Lois returned to the table the band had already started and John Farrar was waiting for her, engaged for the moment in conversation with Helen.

'I'm sorry to keep you waiting,' Lois apologized.

He said nothing, merely smiled, and led her into the dance, a slow waltz.

'I hope you hadn't been waiting long,' she said.

'I didn't mind. Except that I might have spent the time with you.'

'You seemed to be spending it quite pleasantly.' She was ashamed of the stab of jealousy which went through her.

'Oh yes,' he agreed. '*She's* nice enough. But I have the distinct impression that your family doesn't like me - or at least your father doesn't.'

'He wasn't very welcoming,' Lois admitted. 'I honestly don't know why. But there can't be any reason so perhaps we're both wrong.'

'I hope so,' John said. 'Because it's my intention to see a lot of you.'

She said nothing; she couldn't speak. She felt herself trembling and for a moment lost her step, so that he had to wait for her to catch up with the beat.

'Would you like that?' he asked softly.

'Oh yes!' Lois said. 'Oh yes!'

They fell silent, but it was an exquisite silence which needed no words. Everything which might have been said was expressed in the closeness of their bodies, in the languorous rhythm of the waltz. She turned her head to meet his and he rested his cheek on her hair. There was a moment when she thought he kissed the top of her head, though she couldn't be sure, so light was the movement. She was glad that for the waltz the main lights, with their dazzling chandeliers, had been dimmed, and now only swirling beams of soft colours picked out the dancers. When John drew her closer still it was as if the whole world dissolved. It was a feeling entirely new to her; she hadn't known it was possible.

The dance ended and the lights went up. For one second John crushed her tightly against him, then let her go.

'If I don't get to dance with you again, will you meet me tomorrow?' he said urgently. 'You must! Promise you will!'

'I will,' Lois promised. 'Where?'

'Do you know the Almond Tree café in Becker Street? I'll see you there tomorrow morning, ten-thirty. Don't let me down!'

In fact, she didn't dance with him again all evening. At the beginning of each dance she prayed that no-one else would take her away in case she should miss John Farrar, but, though she saw him on the floor, he didn't come near their table. She felt sick and anxious, and angry with her father. It was all his fault. Had the Barneses not been there, she would have hit out at him. How could he spoil what would have been a perfectly wonderful evening? Then eventually Mr and Mrs Barnes, followed by Philip and Helen, got up to dance, almost at the same time a young man came and asked her. She knew him, and in other circumstances would have been happy to dance with him, but not now.

'I'm sorry,' she said, 'I'm engaged for this dance.'

'Then perhaps another one?' he requested.

'I really *am* sorry,' she repeated. 'I'm afraid my card is quite full.'

'What a disappointment,' he said, 'but I'm not at all surprised.'

'Why on earth did you say that?' her mother asked as the young man left. 'Your card's half-empty!'

'Because if I can't dance with John Farrar, then I won't dance!'

'But you can dance with him,' Mrs Brogden said. 'No-one's said you couldn't. The plain fact is, he hasn't asked you again.'

'Of course he hasn't!' Lois flared. 'Why would he after Father was so rude to him? *That's* the reason he hasn't asked me!'

She hoped desperately that that was so. Remembering the way they had danced together, there couldn't possibly be any other reason. Or could there be? She was riddled with anxiety. But of course not! Hadn't he asked her to meet him tomorrow?

She turned to her father. 'Why *were* you so rude and unfriendly? Don't you want me to have a good time?'

'Don't be silly!' he said. 'He just didn't seem your sort, that's all.'

'That's rubbish!' she said furiously. 'You can't possibly know that. *I'm* the judge of who's my sort. You didn't even take the trouble to be civil to him.'

'Lois!' her mother said sharply. 'You must *not* speak to your father like that. Just let it be!'

'Why should I?' Lois countered. She had worked herself up into a passion, and now she was struggling hard to keep back the tears and was not at all sure that she could do so. To make matters worse she saw John dancing by with an exceedingly pretty girl in his arms. Does he dance with her in the way he danced with me? she asked herself miserably.

'Why?' she demanded of her father. 'Why? Why?'

'Well, if you must know,' he said, 'we want nothing to do with his family. It's not so much the lad himself - as you say, I don't know him - but the Farrars are no good to the Brogdens. We don't get on. I can't go into it now.'

'Oh yes you can!' she argued. 'I'm here and I'm listening!'

But he couldn't, because at that moment the dance ended and Mr and Mrs Barnes came puffing and blowing back to the table.

'Now, Lois, we haven't spent all this money to have you sulk in a corner,' Mrs Brogden whispered. 'So, take that look off your face and dance with other young men when you're asked.'

'I certainly will not!' Lois said.

Nor did she. Stonily, she refused every partner, sat out every dance, aware that her behaviour was as bad as her father's, yet unable to do otherwise.

The rest of the evening crawled by. The last waltz was announced; her father took her mother, Philip took his Helen, and Mr and Mrs Barnes took each other. She was alone at the table. She picked up her purse and would have

made for the cloakroom to hide her shame at her solitary state, but before she could move, John Farrar was there.

Wordlessly, he held out his arms and, also without speaking, she went into them and they sailed away into the sweet, throbbing music of the waltz. 'It's Time To Say Goodbye', 'Good-night, Ladies', 'Good-night, Sweetheart'. The tunes followed each other in slowed-down tempo, the lights low again, but though she moved in time to the music, Lois hardly heard it. She was in John's arms once again, and the long, painful interval between the first time and now vanished as if it had never existed. She hardly knew when the dance ended and the music stopped, until she was brought to earth again by his light kiss on her cheek.

'Until tomorrow,' he said.

'Until tomorrow.'

At home - it was already half-past two in the morning - she was undressing when her mother came into the bedroom. She didn't want to see her mother, didn't want to talk to anyone.

'I'm very tired—' she began.

'I know, love. Never mind, you can have a long lie-in in the morning. I won't waken you.'

'You won't have to,' Lois said. She wouldn't have to be wakened. 'I'm meeting John Farrar for coffee.'

The moment the words were out, she wished she hadn't spoken.

'Oh darling, no! It's not wise! Must you?'

'Yes, I must,' Lois said.

'It will upset your grandfather. You know how fond you are of your grandfather. You wouldn't want to upset him, I know that.'

Of course she wouldn't wish to upset her grandfather. He was probably the dearest person in the world to her, even dearer than her mother and father, though she knew it was wrong. And everyone knew she was his favourite

grandchild, perhaps because she was the only granddaughter. He showered her with love and affection. The house in which they lived was his house, although he himself inhabited only two rooms. The food they ate, the two servants who waited on them, were provided by him. It was known to all that when he died his not inconsiderable fortune would be largely hers. But this was not why she loved him. She truly loved Jacob Brogden for himself.

'You're talking in riddles,' she said. 'Why should my seeing John Farrar upset Grandpa? If there's a family feud - and I've never heard of it - why should John and I be involved?'

'It's a long story,' Mrs Brogden sighed. 'And it's very late. We both should be asleep.'

'Then I shall ask Grandpa myself, tomorrow,' Lois said. 'But first I shall keep my date with John - no matter what you say.'

Ten minutes later, though she had tried hard to keep awake in order to relive the sweet moments of the evening, Nature had claimed her due and she was fast asleep.

When she walked into the Almond Tree at precisely ten-thirty the next morning John was already there, seated at a table in the corner. So were at least three friends or acquaintances of her mother. Oh well, she thought as she walked towards him, what have I to hide? Nothing.

He rose and took her hand, then they sat down together and he ordered coffee and toasted teacakes.

'I was afraid you wouldn't come,' he said.

'You needn't have been.'

'I thought your family might have said something to put you off.'

'I wouldn't let them stop me,' Lois said, 'though they are acting strangely. It seems that there's some long-standing feud between your family and mine. I've no idea what it could be. To tell you the truth, I've never heard your family

mentioned. All the same, I think it must be serious. Do you know anything about it?’

‘Not a thing,’ John said. ‘It probably happened before we were born. In any case, it can’t have anything to do with you and me.’

‘That’s what I told my mother,’ Lois said. ‘She’s afraid my seeing you might upset my grandfather.’

‘And would that be important?’ John asked.

‘Yes, it would be,’ she admitted. ‘Grandpa means a lot to me, though not for the reasons they might think. I just happen to love him. But they could be wrong, couldn’t they? I’m going to ask him what it’s all about.’

He leant forward and covered her hand with his, then looked at her intently.

‘And if you had to choose between hurting your grandfather or me ...?’

‘It won’t come to that,’ Lois assured him.

But if it did, how could she give up this new, unbelievable feeling which had so suddenly come into her life? How could she give up this man before she had even had time to get to know him?

She looked at John as if for the first time. Until now she had given no heed to his appearance. His presence was so strong that nothing else mattered. His hair was fair, almost Nordic fair, and it fell down over his forehead. He was quite handsome in an even-featured way. He had a curving mouth which lifted at the corners, as if he was ready to see the humour in things. It was warm in the café and he had taken off his overcoat. In his Fair Isle pullover and flannel shirt he looked younger and slighter than he had last night in his dinner jacket. He had told her he was twenty-one, but he didn’t look it. And she, she knew, looked older than seventeen and a half, so that, for what it mattered, they seemed the same age.

Over their several cups of coffee, they discovered the facts about each other. As facts they were not important, if



they had been totally different it wouldn't have mattered in the least, and yet each small piece of information about the other was of absorbing interest. John lived with his family at Renton, a few miles from Chalywell. He had worked in the family firm since leaving grammar school at sixteen; he could have gone to university, but had never wanted to.

'I shall go into the Air Force,' he said. 'There's going to be a war, everybody knows that, and the Air Force is where I want to be. I want to fly.'

Her stomach lurched at the thought of him leaving her, but in the face of his enthusiasm she said nothing.

'What about you?' he said. 'What do you do with yourself when you're not drinking coffee with young men?'

'At the moment, not a great deal,' Lois admitted. 'I left school a year ago, and as soon as I'm eighteen, this summer, I'm going to start my nurse's training. My family's in antiques. My father and my grandfather too, though he's supposed to be retired.'

'So you don't want to be a lady antique dealer?'

'Not really, though sometimes I help in the shop. I want to nurse. If war comes, they'll need nurses.'

They were still talking when the waitress began to clear away. Looking round, they saw that everyone else had left and the tables were being re-laid for lunch.

'I think we shall have to go,' John said. 'I'd like to ask you to stay on for lunch, but I can't. I said I'd be home.'

'Me too,' Lois said.

He helped her on with her coat and they walked out into the crisp, sunny cold of a January day in Chalywell. In the street they turned up their collars against the wind which, though it blew from the east above the high plain, seemed to come at them from every corner. There was always a wind in Chalywell.

'I'll walk with you as far as your home,' John said.

'It's not far,' Lois told him. 'Just the other side of the Mead. In fact it overlooks the Mead.'

They climbed the hilly street to the top of the town to where the Mead, those scores of acres of short-cropped grassland which gave Chalywell so much of its character, began. Roads ran around its perimeter and paths crossed it, but no houses encroached on the Mead, no flower-beds broke its smooth surface. There was nothing except the greenest of grass and the few noble trees which Nature, with a fine eye for what was fitting, had allowed to grow there.

The best hotels in Chalywell, and the most desirable residences, were those built on the perimeter road, and it was towards these that Lois walked with John Farrar. They walked close together, occasionally bumping into each other, their hands touching from time to time - for which reason they both carried their gloves rather than wore them. The wind was even more biting here than in the lower part of the town. People walked by with nipped faces, heads lowered, hurrying home for a hot dinner.

'It really *is* chilly,' Lois said.

John slipped his arm through hers and began to sing a popular love song as they walked along.

'I'm sorry I don't sing well,' he said, breaking off.

'Oh, but you do!' Lois told him. In any case, it was the words which mattered, the words which warmed her heart.

They were almost at the far side of the Mead now. Lois pointed to a terrace of houses: eighteenth century, four storeys high, beautifully proportioned with tall, sash windows and wide front doors with fanlights above. The deep cream-coloured stone of the district had somehow escaped the soot-carrying winds from the West Riding wool towns. Chalywell was just far enough away from them to tempt the Yorkshire wool barons to reside within its expensive boundaries and at the same time escape the noise and dirt of the places which made their money.

'It's the end one on the left of the terrace,' Lois said. 'It's called Mead House which isn't very original, but it's

apt.'

'It looks a lovely house,' John said.

'It's my grandfather's really. We live with him now that he's old. I'd like to ask you in but probably this isn't the time.'

'Will you meet me tomorrow?' John said. 'Same time, same place? We could go for a walk afterwards.'

Lois nodded. No matter what happened, she would be there.

When she walked into the house her mother, crossing the hall, gave her an enquiring look, but Lois immediately went upstairs to her room, saying nothing. She wanted to hug to herself the beauty of the morning, and to talk to no-one until she had spoken to her grandfather. After lunch, when he had had the little nap which always followed his midday meal, she would go to her grandfather's room and there she would arrive at the truth.

At three o'clock precisely she went into the kitchen.

'I'll take in Grandpa's tea, Ida,' she said to the parlourmaid.

In his room she poured his tea exactly as she knew he liked it: Darjeeling, weak, no milk or sugar, in a fine, white-china cup with a gold rim and handle.

'That's good, love!' he said. 'That's very good.'

While he drank, and nibbled a Marie biscuit, she wandered around his room, picking up this and that, inspecting his treasures as she so often did. He had never discouraged her, even when she'd been a small girl. On the contrary, he had shown her how to handle them carefully, told her the history of the ceramic, or piece of glass or miniature she was holding. She knew it was a disappointment to him that she didn't want to follow in the family business.

'You're wandering about,' he said. 'Come and sit down.'

As she took the chair opposite him his face creased in a smile. He was a small man, appearing smaller still in the

high-backed armchair, and was exquisitely neat and well-groomed. His dark suit, of finest Yorkshire worsted, was beautifully cut by Chalywell's best tailor; his shirt was immaculate and his tie, more flamboyant than the rest of his attire, was of silk. His snowy-white hair, even at eighty, was thick and abundant, and worn a little longer than was fashionable.

'You're looking very solemn, love,' he said. 'Did you enjoy yourself at the ball?'

'Oh yes, Grandpa!' Lois said. 'It was wonderful. In fact, I want to talk to you about it.'

'I should hope so,' he said. 'It's a while since I went to a ball.'

He had seen her before she left, dressed in her finery. She had looked so beautiful, so young and fresh, so like his dear Maria that it had made his heart ache.

'Well, get on with it!' he said. 'I'm a captive audience.'

She still hesitated.

'I don't know where to begin, Grandpa.'

He looked at her more intently now. There was something in her tone of voice, in the seriousness of her pretty face, which warned him that this wasn't to be just idle chatter about ball gowns and dancing partners.

He leant forward and touched her cheek.

'Well, love, there are two places to begin - either right at the beginning, or straight in at the most important point. Choose which suits you.'

And in my case, Lois thought, there is hardly any difference between them. Everything had happened to her with such speed. Hadn't she, from the first minute, felt exactly about John as she did now?

'Grandpa,' she said. 'I'm in love! I've fallen in love!'

A smile lit up his face as a feeling of relief surged through him. What was more natural than that a girl as lovely as his granddaughter should fall in love at a ball? The only surprise to him was that it hadn't happened

sooner. She might well have fallen in and out of love a dozen times in the last year or two.

'Well, my dear, that's not so surprising,' he said gently. 'You're almost eighteen - the age your grandma was when I married her - not that we're talking about marriage,' he added.

Marriage had not occurred to Lois. With John, and it was still less than twenty-four hours since she had met him, she had lived every minute in the present. What she *did* know was that she didn't ever want to be separated from him.

'So, tell me about him,' her grandfather said. 'I take it you met him at the ball?'

'Yes. Oh, Grandfather, he's so nice - and yet—'

'Yes?'

'Mother and Father don't like him. They hardly know him, but they don't like him. They made it horribly plain.'

'Well, that's parents for you,' he said easily. He dismissed her worries with a wave of his hand.

'It's more than that. They said—' Lois hesitated.

'Yes?'

'They said you wouldn't approve. They said it would upset you.'

'If he's not good enough for you, then I *shan't* like it,' Jacob Brogden admitted. 'But I haven't met him, have I? How can I judge? So, you tell me about him. What's his name?'

It was foolish of Herbert and Eileen to oppose the affair so early in the day, he thought. Even if the man wasn't suitable, they were going the wrong way about it. Lois was a spirited girl; opposition would only make her dig in her heels.

'His name is John Farrar,' Lois said.

Like a streak of lightning from a clear blue sky, he felt himself stabbed with anger, transformed by hatred. Lois, watching him, was alarmed by the colour which rose in his

normally pale face, by the vein which throbbed visibly in his temple.

'Farrar!' He almost choked over the word.

But then, he thought, trying to pull himself together, there *were* other Farrars in the world. But if it was some other Farrar, why had his son known he would be upset?

'Tell me the rest,' he demanded.

'He's the grandson of George Farrar, of Farrar's Haulage. That's all I know,' Lois said. 'Oh, Grandpa, is that so terrible?'

'Terrible? It's unthinkable! George Farrar is my most bitter enemy!'

For a moment she was too stunned to answer. The vehemence in his voice, the naked hatred on the face of her kind, amiable grandfather was dreadful to see. She didn't know what to say, and said the first words which came into her head.

'Was,' Lois said. 'He's dead.'

'Do you think I don't know that?' he asked fiercely. 'I know every move that man has made for more than seventy years! There is no way you can take up with Georgie Farrar's grandson. No way at all! I forbid it. You must send him packing at once!'

She was stunned. She felt as though he had struck her a physical blow. She found herself raising her hands as if to fend him off. Then her mood changed and she knew she must not allow this to happen.

'You can't forbid it, Grandpa. I don't want to hurt you, I don't want to go against you, but I'm almost eighteen. You can't tell me who I must see, where I can't go. And in any case, neither you nor anyone else has said *why!*'

'He's no good to you, that's why!' Jacob Brogden said fiercely. 'He's a Farrar - and that's enough.'

'Enough for you perhaps,' Lois persisted, 'but not for me. If you want me to understand, you must tell me more. I need to know. Can't you see it's important to me?'