'There was a peculiar sort of innocence about the man,' declared O'Connor firmly, as if he had often been contradicted on the point; 'an extraordinary innocence.'

'I never warmed to him, Frank,' said O'Faoláin, 'because I thought there was an absence of innocence and simplicity about his nature, at any rate as he presented it when one met him. Whether that was part of a pose or of a mask that he put on I don't know, but you would sometimes wish that he'd drop it and that he'd say “Hello,” or talk in a natural way.'

'But I think he did, Sean. He only posed when he was shy or embarrassed. I kept on telling people, “Now for God's sake don't call him sir, because if you call him sir he'll start posing.”'

'Why should he pose?'

'Simply because he was shy,' hammered back O'Connor; 'and all Irishmen when they are shy instantly fling out into some sort of pose. They keep on talking instead of shutting up.'

'Oh, I know all that sort of thing,' said O'Faoláin, in a downhill rush of words that was meant to carry him up the farther slope. 'Edward Garnett, I think it was, told me when he was very young and they were both poor, in the days when W. B. used to have to black-up his heels so as to cover up the holes in his stockings, saying how they'd walk from his digs to Edward's digs and back again, all night long, absolutely forgetting everything in the most natural way. And once Edward invited him down for a week-end to his country
cottage, and he arrived with nothing but a toothbrush and a bit of soap. He said he was absolutely innocent. Although he had seen the same man in a box when a play of his was on, standing up as he used to do in the Abbey Theatre at the head of the stairs, looking around. Clearly an actor.’

‘But, Sean,’ said O’Connor, ‘I remember when I was in Dublin first, going to a party, and being very shy, Mrs. Yeats signalled me to come and sit beside her. She said, “I knew you were shy because you did exactly as Willie does when he’s shy — you ran your hand through your hair.” And after that, I just looked to see what he did with his hands, and I saw that the man was often shy.’

‘Let’s try,’ said O’Faoláin impatiently, ‘to get an example of this pose which I say he had. What about this — was it a habit or was it sincere? The way he had of not recognizing people, who felt that he must really know them perfectly well. A way of saying “Hello, Tierney” when it was really Binchy — that sort of thing.’

‘Yes, it was a toss-up whether he would say “Hello, Binchy,” trying to pretend that he knew him or, as he often did with me, just hold out his hand and say, “Who have I?” That was the admission that he was blind, which he didn’t like to make normally.’

There was an awkward silence. Brinsley Macnamara stepped into the breach.

‘I remember,’ said he, ‘one such meeting with him myself. He brought me walking round Stephen’s Green, and he finished up by saying something which may have some bearing on what we’re trying to work out now about whether it was a pose or not with him. He said, “A man, an author, should always try to keep the company of his superiors, never of his inferiors.”’

‘But Yeats,’ said dignified Mr. Best, in a gentle voice that somehow had gestures in it, ‘Yeats was always very dignified. When he said something humorous he bent his head in — and